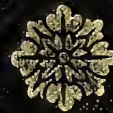
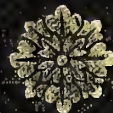
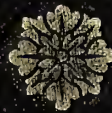
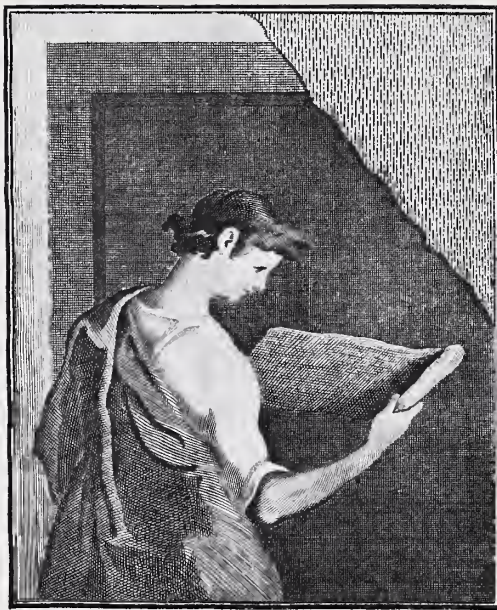


*Rubens*



*Émile Michel*



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RUBENS







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XXXI

*Rubens, Helena Fourment, and their Child.*

(BARON A. DE ROTHSCHILD'S COLLECTION.)



# RUBENS

*His Life, his Work, and his Time*

BY

ÉMILE MICHEL

MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE AND WORK OF REMBRANDT"

TRANSLATED BY  
ELIZABETH LEE

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IN TWO VOLUMES  
VOLUME II

*With Forty Coloured Plates, Forty Photogravures  
and Two Hundred and Seventy-two Text Illustrations*



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PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

(Mr. Lessex.



RUBENS'S DRAWING-ROOM.

(From a Picture in the Stockholm Museum.)

## CHAPTER I

RUBENS'S HOUSE—HIS ADDITIONS TO IT—THE MASTER'S IDEAS ON ARCHITECTURE—RUBENS'S DRAWING-ROOM—RUBENS'S ECLECTICISM: HIS COLLECTIONS AND HIS LIBRARY—HIS MANNER OF LIFE—HIS LOVE OF THE ANTIQUE—HIS ENERGY—HIS READING—HIS FRUGALITY—HIS AMIABILITY—HIS RECREATIONS—PORTRAITS OF RUBENS.



PLATE FROM THE DRAWING BOOK.

(From a Drawing by Pontius after Rubens.)

NOTWITHSTANDING his brilliant and triumphal career, Rubens's chief pleasure lay in domestic life. Eager to ensure a tranquil existence, he settled down as early as possible in a spacious dwelling which he gradually arranged to his taste, and in which he continued to make improvements until his death. There he enjoyed domestic happiness and congenial work, the things that constituted his supreme joy. There his children grew up, there he had his studios, his books, and his collections

of all kinds; he continually made additions to his works of art,

desirous of having within reach things pleasant to look upon, which might aid the progress of his talent, divert or elevate his mind. It is pleasant to think of that grand figure in this setting of splendour and domesticity, and to penetrate its secrets.

Despite the successive changes that the master's house underwent at the end of last century, and of the more fatal damage caused by its division in 1840 into two separate dwellings, the traveller in search of memories of Rubens should not leave Antwerp without visiting the house he lived in ; it is No. 7, in the little street that bears his name. Changed as is the aspect of the house, many things about it still speak of the great painter. The view on entering is striking. The façades of the original buildings, and several of the buildings themselves have vanished, but the walls of the right wing are still standing ; the roof is ornamented as formerly by a weathercock and small metal torches ; and in a loft above what was the master's studio, the pulley destined to hoist up or let down the big panels on which he painted his masterpieces may still be seen. The portico which closed the courtyard is intact ; we see its balustraded gallery, its central door flanked by massive columns, and its pediment decorated with spread eagles, holding garlands in their beaks. On either side are two smaller arcades crowned by busts after the antique, the work of Hubert van der Eynden, with the following inscriptions, from the 10th satire of Juvenal :

*On the left:* Permittes ipsis impendere numinibus quid  
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris.  
Carior est illis homo quam sibi ;

*On the right:* Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano.  
Fortem posce animum et mortis terrore carentem.  
Nesciat irasci ; cupiat nihil.

Such were the lines Rubens chose to have always before him by way of a system of physical and moral hygiene, and they sum up his own life : the frank acceptance of destiny, the perfect balance of intellectual and physical health, strength of mind, courage in face of death, the self-control which restrains men from anger as from other passions, are the chief characteristics of his calm and well ordered life. Passing through the portico, we see, also intact, the pavilion which

Rubens built, in a line with the principal entrance : he reproduced it at the end of the garden in the charming picture at Munich, which represents him walking amid flowers with his second wife on a beautiful spring day, soon after their marriage.

Amid these ruins and relics of the past, we involuntarily think of the noble life, so well filled with affection and work, which ran its course for thirty years in this peaceful spot. We think, too, how the town of Antwerp, in preserving the Plantin Museum, keeps alive an interesting side of its former intellectual activity, and how with even better cause she might also perpetuate the memory of the most illustrious of her children ; we heartily support the recent warm appeal to the old city by M. Max Rooses, who, in our age, has done more than any other to honour its past. With him we wish that a feeling of reverence for the past would induce the town of Antwerp to purchase what still remains of Rubens's old house. "What more natural and striking testimony of its gratitude and admiration could it offer him, than to preserve his dwelling, the cradle of so many masterpieces, from further profanation, and to dedicate it to the worship of his inimitable genius."

During the first years after the purchase of his house, Rubens was content with simple surroundings, but as his position improved, he gradually altered or completed the original buildings. On July 25, 1615, he concluded an arrangement with the master-mason, Francis de Crayer, concerning the repairing of the party-wall which divided his property from that of the Arquebusiers, and in 1617 he had the banisters of the staircase carved by Jan van Mildert.<sup>1</sup>

Rubens had his own ideas on architecture, and himself furnished the workmen with plans ; he devoted larger sums of money to his improvements and additions, and by degrees the house took the shape that conformed to his needs and taste. Its original aspect revealed the master's predilection for the Italian buildings that he had so greatly admired beyond the Alps : a book on the Palaces of Genoa which he published in 1622 testifies to his fondness for them. The brief preface

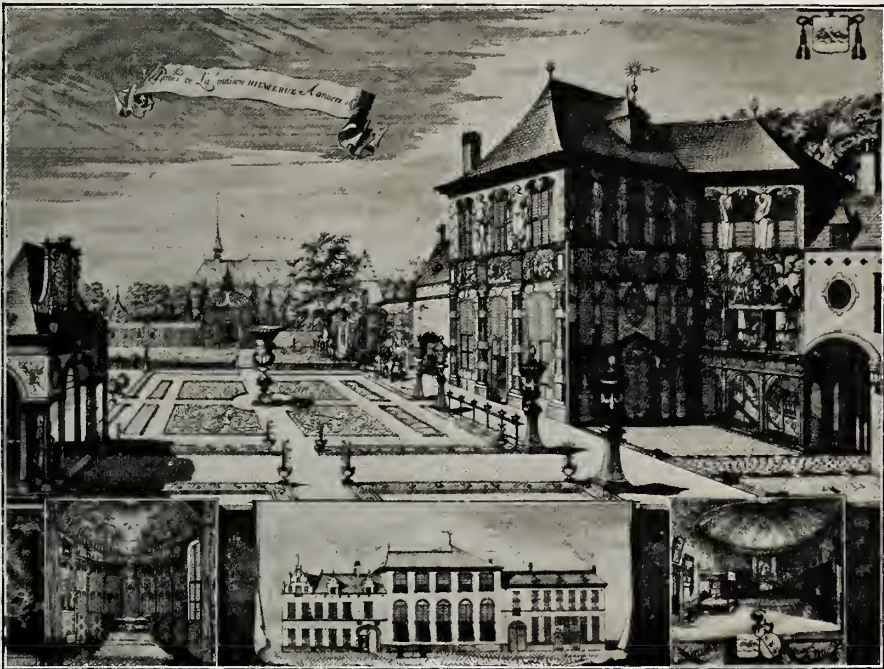
<sup>1</sup> J. van den Branden : *Geschiedenis der Antwerpsche Schilder-School*, p. 510.

tells us that he was exceedingly pleased to see the old style, known as *barbarous* or *Gothic*, gradually go out of fashion and disappear in Flanders, to give place, to the great honour of the country, to symmetrical buildings, designed by men of better taste, and conforming to the rules of the Greek or Roman antique. When he took the drawings and plans which he had made at Genoa out of his portfolios, Rubens intended to contribute towards so useful a work. As a sensible man, he proclaimed the truth of the principle that "the suitability of the building to its purpose nearly always contributes to its beauty," but we must confess that the style of his house greatly departed from the purity of classical form and proportion.

Two plates engraved by Harrewyn in 1684 and 1692 show us what Rubens's house was like at that period, before it had undergone any important changes. Instead of the exactness and sobriety aimed at, it offers an example of the highly ornate mixture of the Flemish and Italian styles, due to his natural taste, and to the many influences to which he had been subjected. The massive proportions, and the somewhat complex lines show strength rather than beauty. But if the details are exuberantly profuse, the vases, bas-reliefs, pilasters, terms, and busts placed between the windows, denote a remarkable felicity of invention. The building has a character of its own, and the diversity of picturesque motives reveals the powerful enthusiasm of an individual and complex genius, in which the advantages of a long education and uninterrupted work are added to, and closely allied with, the gifts of a marvellously endowed nature. Lacking choice forms and harmonious arrangements, the bold lines of the portico, the pleasing glimpse of the pavilion at the end of the garden, the varied colours of the materials, even the paintings which adorn the façades in which may be seen, if not copies, at least reminiscences of the master's pictures of *Perseus and Andromeda*, the *Progress of Silenus*, the *Judgment of Paris*, the *Rape of Proserpine*, etc.—all, when regarded from the point of view of the general effect, discovers the presence and betrays the predilections of the great colourist.



The house was in any case excellently suited for its purpose, and was planned with a view to his domestic life and to his work. Spacious and airy, it contained sufficiently large apartments for his wife, for himself, and their little family, the three children, his daughter Clara, and his two sons, Albert and Nicholas, who had come to enliven the big house, and to furnish the artist with charming models. They could play to their hearts' content under their parents' eyes in the



RUBENS'S HOUSE.

(Facsimile of an Engraving by Harrewyn.)

garden which Rubens had planted with indigenous or exotic trees and shrubs of every kind that he could collect, among the flowers and animals with which the artist loved to surround himself. Studies made by him show us different kinds of dogs,—hounds, mastiffs, and spaniels, and they also appear in many of his pictures. Horses that he was in the habit of riding every day, were close at hand in the stables, and he could study their forms and characteristics without leaving his home. From his windows he saw, above the

irregular silhouette of the gables and spires of Antwerp, a vast expanse of sky, the course of the Scheldt, and the broad plains over which flitted the fugitive, transparent shadows of the clouds, driven by the sea breezes. To a careful observer it formed an ever-changing spectacle, as full of life and movement as could be desired.

But however strong a wish he had to adorn his house, Rubens, as we have said, always practised a prudent economy. The expenses of the buildings, the purchases of pictures, sculptures, gems, engravings and books had been distributed over several years according to his resources. But the valuable works of art which he collected with so much ardour, at last crowded the house to such an extent, that they could not be seen with any pleasure. To enjoy them better, he constructed, as soon as he was able, a large building in the form of a rotunda, in which he arranged his treasures in an orderly fashion. One of Harrewyn's plates gives a view of the interior of the rotunda in 1692, when Canon Hillemerve had turned it into a chapel. But De Piles, who obtained his information from Rubens's nephew, has left a sufficiently detailed description. "Between the courtyard and the garden he built a hall round in shape like the Temple of the Pantheon at Rome, lighted only from the top by a window in the centre of the dome. The hall was filled with busts, antique statues, valuable pictures which he brought from Italy, and other rare and curious objects. Everything was arranged with order and symmetry, and therefore objects which deserved a place there, but for which there was no space, were used to decorate the rooms and apartments of the house."

In 1618 the bulk of the building was finished, and the artist began to arrange the important collections he had recently purchased from Sir Dudley Carleton. In the account of his visit to Rubens in 1621, the Danish physician, Otto Sperling, tells how he found Rubens at his easel, and how, while working, he had Tacitus read aloud to him, and dictated a letter. "As we kept silence," he adds, "fearing to disturb him, he spoke to us without interrupting his painting; neither did he stop the reading, and, as if he wished to give us a proof of his extra-



XXI

*The Procession of the Aged Silenus.*

(MUNICH GALLERY.)



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ordinary powers, he finished dictating his letter." Then after a servant had taken the visitors over the building, and shown them his antiques and his Greek and Roman statues, they went into the pupils' studio; "a large apartment without windows, lighted by a bay in the middle of the ceiling." We agree with M. Max Rooses in thinking that the large studio in which the young men worked was a separate building with an independent entrance, a building that doubtless disappeared after Rubens's death.

A curious picture in the Stockholm Museum gives us a view of the interior of the great artist's dwelling, and helps to complete our information regarding it. Long known as *Rubens's Drawing Room*, it represents a room of elegant simplicity, lighted by windows which look on to a garden. The apartment, hung with greenish coloured leather with designs in gold—chimæras and children grouped round vases and pillars—is furnished in perfect taste. At the back is a high black marble chimney-piece supported by reddish marble pillars, and finished with large gilt fire-dogs; to the right is a sideboard of light polished oak; on the other side under the windows is a table with massive feet, and an Eastern table-cover; there are leather chairs with flower-embroidered cushions; two pictures hang on the walls, and a third above the chimney-piece. In the foreground two richly dressed ladies are talking; they are two friends, for seated close together, they hold each other familiarly by the hand. In front of them three children are playing with a puppy seated on a chair, while the mother, a white spaniel marked with red, looks on somewhat uneasily. The picture, skilful in handling and exquisite in harmony, was formerly attributed most erroneously to Van Dyck, whose manner of execution it in no way recalls; perhaps it was painted by Cornelis de Vos, for, although he has left no other work of the kind nor one of like size, it is very much in his style.<sup>1</sup> The elder of the

<sup>1</sup> The fact that the painting seems to be the work of several artists complicates the question; the reproductions of the pictures hanging in the room, especially that of the *Last Judgment* are freely executed, and although of small size, so fully suggest the spirit of the originals that they might be by Rubens himself. The firm yet delicately modelled heads of the ladies appear to be by Cornelis de Vos; the children, on the contrary, especially the little girl, are painted with a small, timid touch that recalls F. Francken.

two ladies bears a strong resemblance to Susannah Cock, Vos's wife, as she appears in an almost identical dress in his fine *Family Portrait* in the Brussels Museum.

Many critics object to the name *Rubens's Drawing Room*; M. George Goethe, the learned and conscientious director of the Stockholm Museum, thinks it likely to be correct, and certain proofs that seem to us decisive, justify his belief. In a sale inventory of the house drawn up in 1707, gilded leather is mentioned as forming the decoration of one of the sitting-rooms. The table-cover with red ground and black and yellow design, appears in several of Rubens's pictures, and the three paintings on the walls, the *Portrait of Charles the Bold* (now in the Vienna Gallery), *Lot and His Daughters* (formerly in the Duke of Marlborough's collection, from which it passed into that of the late Baroness de Hirsch), and the small *Last Judgment*, are all by Rubens.

In the younger of the two ladies, we, with M. Goethe, recognise the charming and ingenuous features of Isabella Brant; the types of the two boys correspond with those of her two sons, Albert and Nicholas, and their respective ages, with the interval of four years that separated them. The girl presents a difficulty; until now it was believed that Rubens's eldest child, Clara Serena, died young. But in a letter dated February 10, 1624, Peiresc endeavoured to console his friend for the recent loss of his daughter, a fact that makes it certain she lived until then. The details of the furniture, the dates of the pictures on the walls, the types and ages of the different personages, all help to confirm the title given to the valuable picture; it was painted about 1622, and, as M. Goethe thinks, represents a visit of Mme. de Vos to Mme. Rubens.<sup>1</sup> The two ladies were friends, and Rubens thought so highly of his colleague's talent and character, that he procured several commissions for him, and gave him some himself. It is said that when he was too much occupied by great works to paint the portraits of all who applied to him, he sent them to Vos, saying, "Go to him, he does it as well as I do."

<sup>1</sup> Mme. de Vos holds her gloves in her hands: Isabella Brant carries a feather fan, and her hands are bare.



The works of art of every kind that Rubens possessed, gained a great reputation, and drew many visitors to his house. The catalogue of the collection, made a few years later when he transferred it to the Duke of Buckingham, and the inventory drawn up after his death, show us the taste of the collector. In regard to pictures the two



PORTICO OF RUBENS'S HOUSE.

(Facsimile of an Engraving by Harrewy.)

documents clearly prove Rubens's predilection for the Venetian school. In the first list there are not only nineteen paintings by Titian, seventeen by Tintoretto, and seven by Paolo Veronese, but thirty-two copies, of which twenty-one were made by Rubens himself from portraits by Titian. Rubens always professed the greatest admiration for Titian, towards whom he was attracted by numerous affinities. Some of the copies were made in Italy during his youth, others at the time of his second visit to Spain in 1628, when he was in his full maturity.

But Rubens's mind was too open, and too eager for knowledge to be exclusive. He understood and enjoyed every variety of talent, and the names of Raphael, Ribera, Bronzino, Van Eyck, Holbein, Lucas van Leyden, Elsheimer, Quintin Massys, Henri de Bles, Scorel, Antonio Moro, Michael Coxcie, W. Key, Seb. Vranck, Josse de Momper, Palamedes, De Vlieger, Porcellis, Poelenburgh, Heda, etc., whose works are mentioned in the inventory, testify to the intelligent eclecticism that guided his choice. We have already mentioned his admiration for the elder Brueghel, of whose pictures he possessed two; he had an equal appreciation of Adriaen Brouwer, and the seventeen works of his collection are reckoned among the best productions of that delicate colourist and inimitable craftsman. From the naïve titles under which they figure in the inventory, we extract the following: *A Fight between Drunkards where they pull one another by the hair; A Fight where one has another by the throat; A Combat of three where they strike with a pot; A Landscape wherein a man ties his shoes.* Several of these pictures are in the Munich Gallery. According to Houbraken, Rubens's predilection for the painter's work was supported by many acts of kindness towards the painter. The Dutch author relates how Brouwer coming from Amsterdam to Antwerp, neglected to provide himself with the passport that the relations between Flanders and the United Provinces at that period made absolutely essential. He was arrested as a spy by the Spanish soldiers, and imprisoned in the fortress. When Rubens was informed of the misadventure, he not only intervened with the governor to obtain Brouwer's release, but received him into his house, and clothed and fed him at his own expense. Later he provided the money for his funeral, and when himself overtaken by death, was occupied in raising a little monument to his memory, for which he had made the design.

Rubens admitted to the gallery he founded with such great impartiality, a gallery in which masters of all schools and of all periods had a place, not only the greatest geniuses but the best workmen. He was attracted by both, and derived instruction or

pleasure from all. If few artists have possessed so notable an originality, no one profited more by the achievement of his fore-runners. But while he was inspired by them, and occasionally imitated their arrangement, and some of the figures of their compositions, he was always original, translating the borrowed elements into his own style, and adapting them to his own idea. His extraordinary eagerness for knowledge gained him fresh ideas at every turn and enabled him to produce incessantly, without running the risk of deterioration or exhaustion.

Rubens was almost as fond of his antiques—bas-reliefs, busts, engraved stones, and medals—as of his pictures, and we shall notice his love of archaeology in speaking of his correspondence with Peiresc, the brothers Dupuy, and the chief scholars of his time. Constant reading of the classics had advantageously developed the knowledge and ability that all recognised as his in such matters. A good Latin scholar, understanding and speaking most of the languages of Europe, reading was to him more than a pastime, it was a necessity, and his library was both abundant and well chosen. Possibly he acquired a portion of his brother Philip's books after his death; but he continually added to this nucleus without, however, spending large sums, for we find here another proof of the spirit of order and the prudent economy we have already had occasion to note. He indulged even his most legitimate and elevated tastes only as far as he could himself furnish the resources necessary to satisfy them, and it was by extra work that he provided for the expenses of his library. The money accruing to him for the drawings made in his leisure moments for the Plantin Press, was used to purchase books, and we learn from the registers of the firm the importance of Rubens's library and the titles of the works that formed it. The list again testifies to the master's universal and insatiable desire for knowledge. In his thirst for instruction everything interested him, but he had a horror of verbiage and frivolity, and in sending his friend, Pierre Dupuy, a book that he could not read himself, he prevents himself from "making a bad use of valuable time by devoting it to twaddle

(*poltronnerie*), for which he had a natural aversion."<sup>1</sup> Another time he considers it beneath him to trouble himself with the trifles that "hawkers of news (*cantafavole*) and charlatans publish in their reports . . . he wishes to remain in higher regions; *Summa sequar fastigia rerum.*"

The enumeration of his successive purchases reveals the capacities and aspirations of his clear and wide intelligence. Science specially



PORTRAIT OF A LADY.  
(Dresden Gallery.)

attracted him, and the first book he bought on March 17, 1613, treats of natural history: Aldovrandus *On Birds*. The same year there follow by the same author: *Insects*; *Fish*; then other works on *Serpents* and the *Crustaceæ*. In 1615 his taste for botany and horticulture induced him to pay 98 florins for a folio, *Hortus Eystettensis*, published two years earlier at Nuremberg, with numerous plates of flowers and plants. He wished also to keep abreast of geography and travel, and De Bry's four volumes

on the *Eastern Indies* and the *Western Indies* (Frankfort, 1602–1613), are placed to his account at 96 florins. He was specially interested in optics, and we noted among the earliest works executed by him for the Plantin Press a frontispiece and six vignettes for Father F. Aguilon's *Treatise on Optics* (Antwerp, 1613). He gave much attention to a science closely connected with

<sup>1</sup> Letter of October 22, 1626.

the essential conditions of his own art, and Peiresc in a letter to Dupuy (May 29, 1635), regretted the cessation of his correspondence with Rubens at the moment when the master was about to write to him many curious things concerning the anatomy of the eyes. In submitting to him some observations he himself had made on the subject, which "had attracted him long before," Peiresc, as he said "had



SAMSON AND DELILAH.  
(Munich Gallery.)

the advantage over him." It would have been most interesting to know Rubens's reflections on the relations between optics and painting. Unfortunately threats of war between Spain and France interrupted "the discourses on the colours and images which are preserved for some time in the eyes, and are transformed by an admirable arrangement, capable of providing exercise for the most eager naturalists." In the same division of scientific subjects, Rubens possessed also the *Reasons*

of *Motive Power*, by Salomon de Caus, and the *Ephemerides of the Movement of the Stars*.

The study of religion, philosophy and law also attracted him, and he sought the best editions of the great classical authors, poets, moralists and historians. Later, when diplomacy played a greater part in his life, he procured the books from which he could best gain a knowledge of the condition of Europe, and especially of France. He bought successively : *Philippe de Commynes* ; the *Memoirs* of Mornay ; the *Letters* of Cardinal d'Ossat ; the *Mercure Français*, and a large number of political pamphlets : *Avertissement au Roi de France* ; *Charitable Remontrance de Caton Chrétien à Monseigneur le Cardinal Richelieu* ; *Lettres de la Reine Mère au Roy* ; *Satires d'Etat* ; *Mars Gallicus*, &c. But he read chiefly the works of authors like Virgil, Ovid, and Philostratus, who might suggest subjects for pictures ; or those who having a more direct relation to his art, might increase his knowledge of archaeology, numismatics or architecture. He collected a large number of volumes on coins and medals, and on the antiquities of all lands, Roman, Sicilian, Persian, German, &c., together with the treatises of Vitruvius, Vignole, Vincenzo Scamozzi, Jacques Francart, and Serlio.

His purchases became so numerous, and his library increased so greatly, that before his death he was obliged to place his books in one of the houses belonging to him. Many of the volumes were of great value ; but he did not buy them for show, but to read and re-read, to increase his knowledge, stimulate his imagination, "rouse his enthusiasm and give vivacity to his talent." Endowed with a marvellous memory, he knew by heart long passages from Virgil, was thoroughly well read in Roman History, and quotations from the moralists came naturally to his lips or pen. As De Piles observes, "it is not surprising that he showed such abundance in his ideas, such wealth of invention, such erudition and accuracy in his allegorical paintings, and that he worked out his subjects so admirably, introducing only those things that were proper to them ; whence it happens, that having a perfect knowledge of the action he wished to



*The Crucifixion.*

(Drawing in Indian Ink.)

(ROTTERDAM MUSEUM.)





Printed by Draeger, Paris.



represent, he entered more thoroughly into it, and gave it greater animation, but always in keeping with nature." Rubens was as eclectic in the formation of his library as in that of his picture gallery. He took his material wherever he found it, and endeavoured to extract the substance of things from his reading, and to assimilate and turn to the best account the information he thus gained.

Amid the rich possessions of every kind that he had gathered together, Rubens led a simple, frugal life. Doubtless his scale of living increased with time, and was, in all respects, in accordance with his position. But absolute order prevailed in his expenditure, and his principle was, that if a man desired to be unharassed by the cares of business, it should not be put off till the morrow. Thanks to the vigilant care with which he ordered his life, he accomplished an infinitude of tasks without undue haste; his energy was not only extraordinary, but it was marvellously regulated. Information furnished by De Piles, enables us to reconstruct the daily distribution of his time. He was an early riser. "Up at 4 a.m., he made it a rule to begin the day by hearing mass." It was his moment for prayer and good resolutions. By that initial effort of meditation, by stifling the passions that germinate and murmur deep down in the souls of the noblest men, and most strongly in the most active, he gained self-control and the freedom of mind necessary for his work. On his return home, he set to work, and while he painted, De Piles, confirming the statement of the Dane, Sperling, says that he habitually employed "a person at a salary to read to him from one of the classical authors, generally Plutarch, Livy, or Seneca." We doubt that the practice was habitual, or at least that he invariably paid attention while he was at work. If some tasks left his mind free enough to listen to the reader, others, composition for example, were scarcely compatible with such distraction, for the effort they demanded must have wholly absorbed him.

Let us note in passing, the curious mixture of pious observances and pagan reading. Rubens's religious beliefs were sincere, but we find in him, even more than in other humanists of his time, the temperament

then common enough, and so well characterised by M. Faguet, which allowed a man of cultivated mind "to remain a Catholic as far as his faith was concerned, and to be a worshipper of the antique as far as literature was concerned ; to have a Christian soul and a pagan art."<sup>1</sup> Such conflicting ideas in a less robust and less well-balanced temperament would have resulted in irregularities of life, and incoherencies of talent. But Rubens's chief qualities, intelligence, strong will, and practical good sense helped to regulate his conduct and his art. However complex the ideas surging within him, they could co-exist, and far from neutralising each other, they mutually sustained and supported each other, co-operating to give his works and actions a vigorous stamp of originality and strength. Judging by the predominance of quotations from the ancient philosophers and moralists in his correspondence, he was more attracted to them than to the fathers of the Church. Seneca was one of his favourite authors, and, as we have seen, he borrowed the maxims of practical ethics to which he desired to conform his life, and which he inscribed on the walls of his house, from Juvenal.

Rubens probably did the greater part of his work in the morning. But to avoid over-fatigue, he doubtless varied his labours by a visit to his pupils' studio, or by interviews with the engravers entrusted with the reproduction of his pictures, who came to show him the proofs of the plates then in course of execution. These employments and his own work brought him to the middle of the day, when he dined simply with his family. As De Piles naïvely observes, "he lived in such a fashion as to be able to work easily, and not to injure his health. From anxiety not to impair his powers of application, he indulged but sparingly in the pleasures of the table." Such abstinence enabled him to return to his brushes directly after dinner, and he remained in his studio until 5 o'clock. Then he mounted a spirited Andalusian horse and rode along the ramparts, or outside the city.

He devoted the rest of the day to his family and to his friends, whom he often kept to supper. His table was suitably served without

<sup>1</sup> Emile Faguet, *Le seizième Siècle*, 1894.

luxury, "for he was a declared enemy of all excess, whether in wine, viands, or play." Conversation was one of his greatest pleasures, and with his receptive and cultivated mind he never lacked subjects. Setting aside art, he was interested in everything, and it seemed that there must be several men in him, so perfectly competent was he to talk on an infinitude of subjects. But, as in his reading, he had a horror of frivolity or gossip, and keeping in all subjects to what seemed to him its essentials, he united to admirable good sense and lofty views, a simplicity and charm which delighted his interlocutors. It is again De Piles who praises "his winning manner, his easy temper, his flowing conversation, his quick, penetrating intelligence, his calm way of speaking, and his pleasant voice, qualities which rendered him natural, eloquent, and persuasive." His society was eagerly sought by all conditions of men. He was, therefore, obliged to secure himself from interruptions. His intimate friends, understanding the value of his time, knew the hours when they might find him at home without fear of disturbing him.

With the *Romanists* he talked over his reminiscences of Italy, its buildings and masterpieces; with his intimate friends, especially Rockox and Gevaert, he discussed books and archæology, or the affairs of Antwerp. The study of his collections, the arrangement of his engraved stones and medals, provided the opportunity for learned or ingenious



PORTRAIT OF RUBENS.  
(The Uffizi.)

commentary. If he had made a new purchase, he delighted in showing it to his friends, and was pleased at their appreciation. Ecclesiastics, scholars, amateurs, statesmen, enjoyed his society; he spoke to each in his own language, and according to De Piles, "the pleasure taken by great men in his conversation was such, that the Marquis Spinola declared Rubens possessed so many gifts that in his opinion painting was the least of them." His colleagues, whether they wished to discuss art with him, or to ask his advice and assistance, were sure of a cordial welcome. Anxious as he always was not to waste his time, he never failed—and this information we also owe to De Piles—"to go to see the works of the painters who begged him to do so, and he gave his opinion with fatherly kindness, sometimes even taking the trouble to retouch their pictures." Far from disheartening them, he was prodigal of encouragement. As if wishing by his amiability to ask pardon for his genius, he delighted in discovering and praising the best parts of their work, "and found some beauty in every style." Félibien is as explicit as De Piles on this point, and rendering homage to Rubens's rare qualities, declares, "that instead of rousing the envy of other artists, they made him loved by all," for, he adds, "I have learned from persons who knew him well, that far from exalting himself in vanity and pride above other painters on account of his great fortune, he associated with them in so courteous and familiar a fashion that he seemed their equal; and as he was of a gentle and amiable disposition, he had no greater pleasure than to render service to all.<sup>1</sup> Rubens's complete freedom from arrogance, and his frank friendliness, had the happiest results, and through his influence such cordial relations were maintained between the Antwerp artists, that they almost seemed to form one family.

To kindness of heart Rubens added the further charm of physical beauty. De Piles said, "The attraction he exercised, proceeded from the virtues he acquired as much as from the beauty with which nature had endowed him. . . . He was tall of stature, and of dignified

<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens sur les Vies et les Ouvrages des plus excellents Peintres.* Paris, 1685. Part IV., p. 127.

bearing ; he had regularly-formed features, ruddy cheeks, chestnut hair, brilliant eyes, the fire of which was, however, subdued and temperate ; a smiling, gentle, and honest expression." Such, indeed, is his appearance in the different portraits he has left us of himself, in which it is interesting to trace the changes that time gradually produced in his expression and features. We have mentioned the portrait in the picture of the *Philosophers* in the Pitti, painted about 1612-14. The type is the same as in the picture painted in the spring of 1610, now at Munich, where he is represented with his young wife shortly after his marriage. Although MM. H. Hymans and Max Rooses give it a later date, we believe that one of the Uffizi portraits (No. 233 in the catalogue) was painted at the same time. Not only is there a striking resemblance, but the youthful appearance, the silky and not very abundant beard, as well as the summary and rather timid handling, the yellowish colour of the flesh, the opaque shadows and the hasty hatchings with which the hair and beard are treated, confirm our hypothesis. Comparison with the other portrait of Rubens in the same room of the Uffizi (288 in the catalogue) appears to leave no possible doubt.<sup>1</sup> This is the well-known, the classical portrait, the portrait which we immediately recall whenever the master's name is mentioned, the presentment of him, familiar to all through P. Pontius's fine engraving. The painter is seen three-quarters face, standing, against a greenish-gray background, dressed in black, with a guipure lace collar half hidden by a cloak, and a gold chain round his neck. Although he was then forty-five years old, he looks much younger. His hat, set somewhat coquettishly on one side, shows the top of his forehead, where the hair is already scanty. He has a refined and ruddy mouth, a frank, steady glance ; the moustache is boldly turned up ; the beard has become thicker and more curly. We have here a man in the full maturity of life, and the execution at once broad and delicate, proclaims the ripeness of his talent. It is the great artist in all his glory. He has already produced masterpieces ;

<sup>1</sup> A reproduction of the portrait appears at the beginning of this volume. There are replicas at Windsor in the possession of the Queen, and at Aix in that of M. Guillibert ; both are by Rubens.

without false modesty, without vanity, he is conscious of his powers, and among his contemporaries there is no name to equal his. The Countess of Lalaing's little page has made his way: but no more than the rest is he surprised at his good fortune. He associates familiarly with the great, he possesses health, wealth, fame, fate smiles on him. Such is the aspect in which it is meet he should appear to posterity. Such is the portrait it has preserved of him, the presentment of him that most closely corresponds to his brilliant life and genius.



PEN DRAWING.

(The Louvre.)





FRAGMENT OF A SKETCH FOR THE OLYMPUS.  
Painted for the Medici Gallery. (Munich Gallery.)

## CHAPTER II

MARIE DE' MEDICI COMMISSIONS RUBENS TO DECORATE THE LUXEMBOURG PALACE—  
HIS RELATIONS WITH PEIRESC—THE SKETCHES FOR THE MEDICI PICTURES AND  
THE CARTOONS FOR THE "HISTORY OF CONSTANTINE"—VISITS TO PARIS IN 1622,  
1623 AND 1625—RUBENS'S DIPLOMATIC MISSION.



FRAGMENT OF A DRAWING.  
(Albertina Collection.)

**D**ESPITE his love of domesticity, Rubens at this period had frequently to leave his home, and to renounce for a while the tranquil, industrious life he had hitherto led. Marie de' Medici determined that he should decorate the palace she had just built at Paris. Rubens's fame had already made him known throughout Europe, and he was no stranger to the Queen of France. She had heard of him from her sister Eleonora, the wife of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga, in whose service he spent over eight years in

Italy. The two sisters kept up affectionate relations, in spite of the distance that separated them. They continually exchanged letters and gifts, flowers, head-dresses, and other articles of dress that they took pleasure in manufacturing themselves.

About two years after Henry IV.'s assassination, Marie de' Medici, who had hitherto lived in the Louvre, thought that she would like a residence of her own, and decided to build the Luxembourg Palace: the part of the town chosen by her for its site was then little frequented; but some fine houses, notably that of her favourite, Concini, had already been erected there. The work was begun in 1613, under the direction of Jacques de Brosse; who, obeying the queen-mother's wishes, tried as far as possible to imitate the style of the Pitti Palace, where she had been brought up. But Marie de' Medici had scarcely taken up her residence in the new palace when she had to leave it, after the murder of Marshal d'Ancre and the pillage of his house in 1617. For some time her exile and imprisonment at Blois removed her from Paris; but she returned to the Luxembourg after the conclusion of an agreement between her and her son at Brissac, through the intervention of Richelieu, on August 12, 1620. She then determined to have the great gallery adjoining her reception rooms decorated with paintings. Its walls offered considerable surface; and towards the end of 1621, Claude de Maugis, Abbé of St. Ambroise, Marie de' Medici's treasurer, was sounded by Baron de Vicq, the minister from Spanish Flanders to the King of France, concerning the advisability of entrusting the work to Rubens, as the only artist capable of carrying out so important an enterprise. The Abbé of St. Ambroise was considered a connoisseur of painting, and he prevailed on the queen to select Rubens, who was informed of the honour conferred on him. The Infanta Isabella gave her consent, and when Rubens took leave of her, requested him to deliver to Marie de' Medici, on her behalf, a little dog with a collar ornamented with enamelled plaques. Doubtless, the princess, who, by the recent death of her husband, had become governor of Flanders, asked Rubens, in whom she placed implicit confidence, to be sure to keep her informed of the attitude of the French Court, and of what went on there. We learn from a letter of Fabri de Peiresc to his friend the juriconsult J. Aleander, that Rubens was at Paris on January 11, 1622. He was still there on February 11; for Jan Brueghel, writing on that date to his patron, the Cardinal Borromeo, informed him that "his secretary," Rubens, was just then in Paris,



XXII

*Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus.*

(MUNICH GALLERY.)



Cliché Hanfstaengl

Printed by Chassepot Paris (France)



whither he had been summoned by the queen-mother. The painter was presented to Marie de' Medici on his arrival, and his well-bred manner and natural distinction soon won her favour. But he was wise and prudent enough to see the necessity of understanding the somewhat complicated affairs amid which he had to steer his course. The choice of subjects for the paintings was a particularly delicate matter. The queen had no false modesty, and, according to the custom of the time, wished to be herself the subject of the pictures for her gallery, to see recorded there the history, or rather the *apologia*, of her own life. A similar gallery in the left wing of the palace was to be decorated later with paintings devoted to the life of Henry IV.

Although Marie de' Medici's life had been sufficiently varied, it was not easy just at that moment to turn its picturesque episodes to account. Rubens would have had no trouble in choosing the right incidents at a distance, left to his own devices, and permitted to select the subjects he found most suitable for his purpose. But the most striking episodes of her history were exactly those that had to be passed over in silence, or treated ambiguously. The artist was tied down to trivialities for fear of rousing passions still susceptible. Henry IV. was not a model husband, and the queen had not shown the gentleness and patience that a woman of loftier dignity or virtue would have called to her aid; on the contrary, the intriguing spirit and the thirst for power which, after the king's death, caused such numerous disputes with her son, and brought so many troubles on France, had been prominent from the first.

But a certain number of subjects had been chosen more or less happily. The first pictures of the series were devoted to the beginnings of the queen's life, to her birth and education: these subjects presented no difficulties, and gave ample opportunity for the flattery then in vogue. The young princess did not lack beauty; she had been brought up at the Court of the Medici, where art and learning had long been held in honour, and had received an education suited to her rank. But in the *Presentation of Marie de' Medici's portrait to Henry IV.*, perversions of the truth began to assume a more important place. Love, it is well known, had no part in the King of France's choice of

his wife. When, after his divorce from Queen Margaret, he determined to marry again, he thought at first of the Infanta Clara Isabella Eugenia, governor of Flanders, and "he would have put up with her, old and ugly as she was, if, in marrying her, he married the Netherlands." He also hoped that Sully's choice might fall on Gabrielle d'Estrées; and what he most feared was an alliance with the house of



PORTRAIT OF MARIE DE' MEDICI.  
(The Louvre.)

Medici, with the family which had produced "the queen-mother Catherine, who had brought so many troubles on France." But his various obligations to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the large sums of money he owed him, decided him to set aside such considerations; and the lengthy negotiations which the marriage entailed were directed to obtaining a larger dowry with the princess, a dowry that should be sufficient to set the royal treasury afloat again. The princess joyfully looked forward to the high position she was to occupy, and even had a passing hope of touching the heart of her elderly husband. At a distance he was extremely attentive. He desired his future wife to dress herself according to French fashions, and sent her doll models for that purpose; with much joviality he begged her to take great care of her health, so that "they might produce a fine child who would make his friends laugh and his enemies weep." But the illusion did not last long. The marriage took place by proxy at Florence; when, after a disagreeable voyage the princess landed at Marseilles with her splendid

Medici, with the family which had produced "the queen-mother Catherine, who had brought so many troubles on France." But his various obligations to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the large sums of money he owed him, decided him to set aside such considerations; and the lengthy negotiations which the marriage entailed were directed to obtaining a larger dowry with the princess, a dowry that should be sufficient to set the royal treasury afloat again. The princess joyfully looked forward to



retinue, she was greatly disappointed to find that her husband had not come to meet her, but had sent his chancellor in his stead. The official ceremony took place at Lyons, where the fickle husband had again fallen under the influence of his mistresses, and he soon forced his new consort to admit Henriette d'Entraigues to her table. Such was the beginning of a married life that was a continuous series of quarrels and difficulties.

It must not be forgotten that the *Coronation of Marie de' Medici*



VIEW OF THE LUXEMBOURG PALACE, PARIS.

(Facsimile of an old Engraving.)

at *St. Denis*, which the queen suggested as a subject for one of the pictures, preceded her husband's assassination by one day only. She made little pretence of grief; and although we do not altogether believe the terrible accusations levelled against her at the time, it was not to be expected that she should deeply lament the man who had heaped humiliations on her. During the regency, which marked the zenith of her prosperity, she was beset by all kinds of difficulties.

Those events were already somewhat far off, and there was no danger in representing their more favourable side, even at the expense of the truth. But with more recent events the matter became more

difficult. Judging by the numerous halting treaties of peace and insincere reconciliations that had taken place between the mother and son, it was not likely that the latest one would be more lasting. Each of the parties preserved their resentment and their hopes, and in such a delicate and equivocal situation, everything in the choice of the episodes and the manner of treating them that tended to glorify the queen's conduct would seem to throw blame on that of the young king.

Fifteen subjects were, however, agreed upon: the *Birth of the Queen*, her *Education*, the *Presentation of the Portrait*, the *Wedding by Proxy*, the *Landing at Marseilles*, the *Wedding Festival at Lyons*, the *Birth of the Dauphin*, the *Coronation*, the *King's Death* and the *Regency*, the *Taking of Juliers*, the *Prosperity of the Regency*, the *Council of the Gods*, the *Marriage of Lewis XIII.*, the *Marriage of the Queen of Spain*, and lastly, *Delivering over the Government to the King*. Four subjects, to come between this last picture and the preceding one, were to be decided upon later.

The discussions entailed by the scheme proved to Rubens on what a delicate task he had entered. He therefore determined to avoid the incessant annoyances to which he must have been subjected, had he worked at Paris, where he would have been exposed to the gossip and criticisms of the Court. It was agreed that he should paint the pictures at Antwerp; he was to begin at once, and to return to Paris when eight or ten of them were finished, in order to judge of their effect when hung. He was allotted a sum of 20,000 crowns for the decoration of the two galleries. Rubens was careful to get together all the necessary information for his work, and he made two slight sketches of Marie de' Medici in black and red chalk, one in profile, the other almost full face.<sup>1</sup>

Rubens must also have conciliated Lewis XIII., for the king gave him another commission, equally important, in the shape of a series of twelve compositions, to be reproduced in tapestry, representing the *History of Constantine*. It was just the kind of work Rubens liked; and his knowledge of the antiquities of Rome, and the experience

<sup>1</sup> The first is in the Albertina Collection; the other, reproduced here, is in the Louvre.

gained through the cartoons of the *History of Decius Mus*, made it easy for him to carry out the commission in a satisfactory and rapid manner.

These preliminaries had taken up much time. But Rubens found compensation for wearisome discussions in the society of distinguished men. It was not, however, among the painters that he found the most congenial associates. Indeed, there were at that time scarcely any of importance in France. Martin Fréminet had died in 1619, and the young generation of artists whose aspirations drew them to Italy were settling there. Simon Vouet had left France in 1612, and remained in Italy until 1627. Poussin was then twenty-eight years old; he had only produced second-rate works, and had so far done nothing to attract attention. Two years later he went to Rome, whither Valentin and Claude Lorraine soon followed, to remain there, as he did, for the rest of their lives. In the foreign colony at Fontainebleau, the successors of the Italians whom Francis I. had invited, and of the Flemings, Ambrosius Dubois, and Toussaint Dubreuil, who had replaced them, lacked talent, rather than opportunities to manifest it.

In such a dearth of artists it is not surprising that Marie de' Medici should have applied to Rubens. Among his colleagues, then, there was scarcely any one with whom he cared to associate. But Paris possessed a select society of men of culture, who united the charms and attractions of perfect breeding to strong good sense. Rubens now made the personal acquaintance of Claude Fabri de Peiresc, one of the most eminent and amiable scholars of the time. Peiresc, born on December 1, 1580, at Belgentier, in Provence, was nearly of an age with Rubens, and was drawn to him by affinities of character and tastes. He had for a long time heard him much spoken of, and had a great desire to make his acquaintance. The artist had cause to be grateful to Peiresc, for it was in consequence of his intervention at the instance of Gevaert, their mutual friend, that he obtained in 1619 privileges for the sale of his engravings in France. When Peiresc sent Gevaert the notification of the privilege, asking him to forward it "to his great friend, Master Rubens," he added that he should

immensely like to visit Antwerp,<sup>1</sup> to see the fine heads of Cicero, Seneca, and Chrysippus,



PORTRAIT OF JOANNA OF AUSTRIA, GRAND DUCHESS OF TUSCANY, AND MOTHER OF MARIE DE MEDICI.

(The Louvre.)

of which he wanted, if possible, and if he would permit him, to steal a hasty sketch." Rubens later showed his gratitude by sending Peiresc some of the best plates engraved after his pictures, and he promised to add drawings of his antique busts as soon as he could. He said that he feared he had behaved indiscreetly to Peiresc, "not having had any means of requiting him." The acquaintance was quickly formed, Rubens was introduced to Peiresc's friends, and a friendship and correspondence was begun which lasted until his death. Together they visited the royal collections and those formed by connoisseurs in such large numbers at Paris at the end of the preceding century. In consequence of the political troubles, many of

these collections were broken up, and Rubens probably found

<sup>1</sup> He had already been there to see the collection of antiquities formed by the painter, W. Coeberger.

opportunities for making purchases for his own valuable collection at Antwerp. Among friends whose wide interests included literature, natural science, politics, and above all, archæology, objects of conversation could never have been wanting. The pleasure Peiresc derived from the intercourse is touched on in a letter to Gevaert on February 22, 1622, in which Peiresc thanked him "for having procured him the goodwill of Rubens; he (Peiresc) could not sufficiently praise his courtesy or worthily celebrate his lofty virtue, great learning, and marvellous knowledge of antiquity, or his rare skill in worldly affairs, the excellence of his hand and the great charm of his conversation, which, during his short visit to Paris, afforded him the pleasantest entertainment that he had enjoyed for a long time;" and Peiresc concluded by envying Gevaert the privilege of having such society always within reach.



DUKE FRANCESCO DE' MEDICI.

(The Louvre.)

Notwithstanding the delights of such a friendship, Rubens was

anxious to return to his work and his home. It was necessary that the important series of pictures he had undertaken should be finished quickly, both to satisfy Marie de' Medici's impatience, and also lest circumstances should cause a change in the plans. The artist returned to Antwerp on March 4, 1622, and immediately set to work. He saw the difficulties of his task more clearly when, at a distance, he brought his usual good sense and perspicacity to bear on it. The queen-mother had commissioned him to paint the story of her life; but in consequence of her disputes with her son, it was dangerous to be explicit, for the young king was certainly the master. To avoid offending him it was necessary to steer a middle course. For the moment, it is true, there was peace between them; but, taking into account Lewis XIII.'s reserved disposition, the queen-mother's intriguing mind, Gaston d'Orleans' duplicity, and the opposing passions and interests that divided the Court, it was impossible to say how long the truce would last. Rubens would have been able to keep to the facts of history if their lives had been more united, their characters more open and upright, and the situation less equivocal. But in face of the number of memories it was unsafe to awaken, over-accuracy would have been imprudent. The only plan was to temporise, and to make a large use of allegory in which it was easy to be vague, and to take refuge, whenever necessary, in the clouds. Besides, allegory was the fashion, and Rubens had seen it highly honoured in Italy, and had largely practised it himself. He showed wisdom in having recourse to it on this occasion, although he certainly somewhat abused it. Occasionally when he is purposely ambiguous, he verges on veritable enigmas; but such subtleties were not displeasing in that age, and in the case of the more delicate episodes, it was prudent to stimulate curiosity, and to allow the same things to be capable of various interpretations.

Peiresc sent Rubens (April 7 and 8, 1622) the dimensions of the panels which the architect had supplied, and certain modifications of the original plan were suggested. On May 10, 1622, the artist sent in a general scheme of the proposed decorations, for which he painted the sketches himself. Sixteen of them are now in the Munich Gallery,



*The Adoration of the Magi.*

(Drawing for Vostermann's engraving.)

(THE LOUVRE.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)





Printed by Draeger, Paris.



five at the Hermitage, and one in the Louvre. It is extremely interesting to study these sketches, comparing them with the finished paintings. We seem to see the artist's idea spring forth living and spontaneous. His sense of the picturesque shows itself in the happily diversified lines of the silhouette, in the balancing of the masses, in the skilful distribution of the values: the sketches form, as it were, the framework of the structure; the artist fixed it in so definite a fashion that he scarcely modified it in the course of his labour. On the other hand, only the slightest indications, in very dull tones, are given of the colouring. Indeed, the sketches look like *grisailles*. A few light rubbings here and there mark the colours—blues, pinks, pale, diluted lilacs—on which the high lights, dashes of almost pure white, are touched on to the wet paint. The painter thus tried the effect of his work, and on the neutral, transparent ground, he could bring one tonality into prominence or contrast several, according to the harmony he wished to obtain. The sketches are most explicit in this respect; very transparent and much lower in key than the actual tones, they formed an admirable guide for his collaborators; a middle scale was maintained that allowed Rubens to retouch the work freely, and to alter it without fear of rendering it heavy or opaque.

Nothing was left to chance. The result had every appearance of spontaneity, but Rubens regulated and foresaw everything in advance. While he thus made preparations for the definitive work, he arranged for its execution by his pupils. As Van Dyck's departure deprived him of his most intelligent and skilful collaborator, he was forced to look more carefully after those who assisted him, and to mark out for each the work best suited to his particular capacities. Justus van Egmont, Wildens, Snyders, perhaps also Lucas van Uden, and Theodor van Thulden worked on the paintings for the *History of Constantine*, Rubens only supplying the sketches. Thus there was plenty of work for all, and the studio resembled a beehive in its activity.

The master not only retouched the whole work, but himself painted the most prominent passages, or those that most interested

him, especially the figures of the royal personages. When it happened that the material he had gathered in Paris was not sufficient, he demanded further information of his correspondents. He asked the Abbé of St. Ambroise if he could obtain "a high relief of the queen;" and the Abbé told him of "a small bronze head by Barthélemy Prieur, a good sculptor."<sup>1</sup> Another time the painter felt uncertain about the mythological attributes with which he wished to surround Marie de' Medici, and asked the Abbé if she was born during the day or at night, "so that he might know the sign that presided over her birth." Peiresc, with his usual kindness, was often the intermediary in such inquiries. He was asked by the Abbé on August 1, 1622, to inform Rubens that the queen accepted the general plan that had been submitted to her, but proposed the suppression of two of the projected paintings: *The Queen going to hear the decision of the Gods in regard to the Marriage*, and the *King receiving his Wife in the presence of the Queen-mother*. On September 15, the Abbé being informed that seven or eight of the pictures were well advanced, urged Rubens to come and hang them, and to bring the sketches with him. Peiresc strongly suspected that Maugis intended to appropriate the sketches, and the event proved him right. Rubens presented them to Maugis in recognition of the trouble he had taken over the affair, and the greater number of them passed from his collection into that of the Elector of Bavaria, and thence to the Munich Gallery.

Peiresc, according to the promise he had made Rubens, criticised the projected compositions with friendly candour. In a letter dated September 25, he reminded Rubens that he had been present at Marie de' Medici's marriage by proxy to Henry IV. on October 5, 1600, at Florence. "I remember with pleasure that you were also present at the nuptials of the queen-mother in Santa Maria del Fiore and at the banquet. I thank you for reminding me of the Iris, who appeared while we were at table, and of the Roman Victory dressed as Minerva, who sang so charmingly. I much regret

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, for the portraits of the queen, of whom, as of Henry IV., he made two sketches, he followed the types furnished by Guillaume Dupré's medallions.

that we did not then make each other's acquaintance." In discussing some of the details in the picture, he told him that the group of the *Pietà* which presided over the scene, and the cardinal's hat lying on the altar were inaccurate, but Rubens in his reply vouched for the correctness of these details that had remained fixed in his memory.

Four of the cartoons for the *History of Constantine* were finished



THE FATES AND THE TRIUMPH OF TRUTH.  
Sketch for the Medici Gallery. (The Louvre.)

shortly after, and about the end of November, 1622, Rubens sent them to Paris. On December 1, Peiresc tells him of the impression they made on those who saw them; on "MM. de Loménie, de Fourcy, de St. Ambroise, de la Baroderie, Jacquin, and Dunot, who are almost all persons entrusted by the king with the inspection of public works." As the artist had informed Peiresc of the details of the subjects, he had been able to explain his meaning. Other persons had seen them, among them the Archbishop of Paris, and the

spectators had exchanged opinions. They were unanimous in praise of "the profound knowledge of antique costume, and the accuracy of their rendering, even to the nails in the shoes." But criticisms had been made on the pose of certain of the figures, especially on the manner in which the legs were curved. While defending his friend to the best of his ability, whom he had heard praise "the beautiful curve of the legs of the *Moses* at Florence, and of the *St. Paul*," Peiresc wrote to him: "If you do not make up your mind to use very natural attitudes in the gallery-pictures wherever you have curved legs, you will have little satisfaction, for you have to reckon with ignorant persons who like nothing that is opposed to their own ideas."

Unfortunately we do not possess Rubens's reply to this criticism. But Peiresc assured him of the pleasure afforded him by his defence, adding, that "he would mention the painter's ideas the first time he met critics who did not know what they were talking about." The master paid no attention to such observations during the course of the work, although it must be conceded that they were well founded. Rubens certainly did exaggerate the curvature of the legs in some of the figures, a proceeding that cannot be justified either by truth to nature or a regard for style. Examples are to be found in the *History of Constantine*, and they persist in several of the Medici Gallery paintings, especially in the figure of Henry IV. in the picture entitled *Portrait of the Queen*, and in the *Departure for the Wars in Germany*. Notwithstanding, the style of the *Constantine* tapestries—two complete series from different factories are in the Garde-Meuble at Paris—is very fine, and their general effect most decorative.

The space allotted in the Luxembourg Palace to the paintings of the Life of Marie de' Medici was found to be greater than had been anticipated, and so larger dimensions were given to three of the projected pictures: the *Coronation of the Queen*, the *Apotheosis of Henry IV.*, *The Regency and the Government of the Queen*. These large canvases were placed at one end of the gallery, and divided in two the eighteen other compositions hung between the windows which lighted

the gallery symmetrically, nine looking on to the garden, and nine on to the courtyard. The small space between the two doors leading to the Queen's room, was to have the portraits of Marie de' Medici's father and mother, placed on either side of a fireplace, above which a space was reserved for her own portrait. The new measurements for the pictures were sent to Rubens at the beginning of November, 1622, and he had to alter the sketch that he had already made for the *Coronation of the Queen*, in order to allow it more scope.<sup>1</sup> The short time allowed for the completion of the whole work did not permit a moment to be lost. At the beginning of May, 1623, the queen-mother, hearing that some of the pictures were ready, begged Rubens, through the Abbé of St. Ambroise, to bring them to Paris so that she might judge of their effect in the places for which they were destined. The artist arrived with nine of the canvases on May 24, and had them immediately re-stretched. With his usual amiability, he brought with him part of a collection of coins left by Charles de Croz, Duke of Aerschot; Rockox had tried in vain to sell them *en bloc* in Antwerp, and thought it might be easier to dispose of them in Paris. According to an arrangement between Rubens, Peiresc, and a well-known collector, the President de Laujon, the coins were divided into several lots, of which the three contracting parties took the larger share.

As soon as the pictures were hung, Marie de' Medici came purposely from Fontainebleau to see them. According to the testimony not only of Peiresc (letter to J. Aleander, June 23), but of Giustiano Friaudi, the Duke of Mantua's representative (despatch of June 15), she found them "admirably successful." Rubens, much encouraged, returned as soon as possible to Antwerp to continue his task, where his extraordinary energy enabled him to carry on other occupations. To say nothing of his correspondence, which was at all times extensive, he executed numerous commissions for pictures. But so regularly and rapidly did he carry on his work, that on September 12, 1624, he wrote to M. de Valavès, Peiresc's brother, that he hoped to finish the pictures for the gallery in six weeks, and to meet him at Paris when he came,

<sup>1</sup> The first sketch is in the Hermitage and the other in the Munich Gallery.

He also hoped to be present at the marriage of Henrietta of France with Charles I., then Prince of Wales, which was to take place during the Carnival. He had, indeed, good reason to hasten, for he soon received a command to go to Paris with all his pictures at the latest on February 4, 1625. As if this excessive labour which made of him "the busiest and most hard-worked man in the world," was not enough, when the Abbé of St. Ambroise sent him those instructions, he added "the dimensions of a canvas which the Cardinal Richelieu wished him to execute; and Rubens complained of the smallness of the dimensions, for he had no fear of not being able to carry out any commission that was given him." But in spite of his industry, Rubens found that he could not be quite ready on the date appointed. He determined, therefore, to work no more at the pictures, but to leave them to dry, and to set out for Paris at the time arranged, where he would finish those that were not completed, and retouch them all after they were hung.

The artist on his arrival fixed his studio at the Luxembourg.<sup>1</sup> He was thus better able to finish the large canvas of the *Coronation of the Queen* in which numerous portraits of the personages of the Court figured, and also to paint a new picture to replace the *Marie de' Medici leaving Paris* which formed part of the original scheme. The sketch at Munich justifies the suppression; it was recognised somewhat late that it would be wise to omit the episode in which Hate and Calumny sowing discord between mother and son, Frenzy holding her torch in her hand, Cunning carrying a fox under her arm, and even a dog barking at the queen, formed a whole composed of details over-significant. It was arranged that this irritating subject should be replaced by that of the *Prosperity of the Regency*, which, while doing honour to the queen for the supposed prosperity of the kingdom under her administration, would be in no way offensive to the king. The change added largely to Rubens's burden of work. Happily the betrothal of the Princess Henrietta, which had been fixed for the same day as the opening of the gallery, was postponed until

<sup>1</sup> He was accompanied by his pupil, Justus van Egmont, who remained in Paris much longer than his master.



May 8, 1625, and the respite made it likely that Rubens would be able to finish his heavy task. The conditions under which he had to carry



PORTRAIT OF MARIE DE' MEDICI.

(The Prado.)

it on would have been enough to discourage any one but himself. De Piles tells us that "the Queen Marie took so great a pleasure in his conversation, that during the whole of the time he was working at the

two pictures for the Luxembourg Gallery which he painted at Paris, her Majesty was always with him, as delighted to hear him talk as to see him paint. One day she offered to introduce him to the ladies of the Court, that he might judge of their beauty. He looked at them attentively, and pointing out one who seemed to him the most beautiful, said, "that must be the Princesse de Guéménée." He was right, and when M. Bautru<sup>1</sup> asked him if he knew her, he replied "that he had never seen her before, but that he recognised her from what he had heard of her beauty."

These details show the easy good breeding of the man of the world, accustomed to the usages of society, and possessing the gift of pithy speech. Sometimes, absorbed in his work, he paid scant heed to the vapid talk going on around him; but at others, he gave his whole attention to the conversation, leading it to the subjects which were of importance to the Governor of Flanders, and on which she desired information. In fact, the diplomatist in Rubens was beginning to appear. In the last letter written by him from Antwerp to M. de Valavès (January 10, 1625), he protested in vain that "so far as public affairs were concerned, he was the most dispassionate of men, except when they affected his property and person; but since he regarded the whole world as his country, he thought he should be welcome everywhere." Such assurances must not be taken too literally, for he had already begun to take part in politics. The few words he adds incidentally, and as if attaching no importance to them, on the situation in Europe, on the siege of Breda, so obstinately prosecuted by the Marquis of Spinola "that no power can help the town, so strongly is it blockaded," are intended to be repeated, to show France the uselessness of assisting the Dutch rebels, and the advantages of allying herself with the King of Spain. Rubens felt his way, and under cover of the paintings which seemed to occupy his mind to the exclusion of all besides, he was soon able to form useful

<sup>1</sup> Bautru, Marquis de Séran, was, before his adhesion to Richelieu, one of the queen-mother's familiar associates. Richelieu employed him in several missions, and Rubens met him several times in the course of his career.



XXIII

*Portrait of Michael Ophovius.*

(HAGUE MUSEUM.)



Cliche Hanfstaengl

Printed by Chassepot, Paris (France)



relations, and enter actively into the negotiations with which he had been associated for some time past.

On September 30, 1623, the Infanta Isabella had bestowed on Rubens a pension of ten thalers a month, charged on the citadel of Antwerp, a pension that Philip IV. raised later to forty thalers "as a reward of merit and of the services already rendered to the king." The "services rendered to the king" went back some years. At the date when Isabella rewarded them, the royal archives of Brussels possessed a letter from Rubens to the Chancellor Pecquius, concerning preliminaries relating to a renewal of the truce between Spain and the Low Countries; the matter was introduced by a person designated as the *Cattolico*, who was, in fact, a certain Jan Brant, a nephew of Rubens's father-in-law. In those disturbed times, in addition to the official agents entrusted with affairs of state, others, who were, so to say, unauthorised, offered their assistance; some did so spontaneously for the public good, others from interested motives, hoping to obtain direct profit from their intervention. Sovereigns found it expedient to have recourse to such intermediaries; it allowed them, without fear of compromising themselves, to attempt combinations of which they could always, if they pleased, disclaim the responsibility. Latterly some of these agents had been caught and violently ill-treated, and it had not been possible to intervene in their behalf. In this very year, indeed (1624), the Dominican Father Michel Ophovius, Rubens's confessor, had attempted to intervene between the Spaniards and the Dutch; and having ventured to Heusden on false information, he was not only imprisoned there, but very nearly paid for his imprudence with his life.<sup>1</sup> Henceforth more circumspection was needful, but this was not a reason for giving up a practice whose usefulness was highly appreciated. The Infanta knew the value of the services to be expected from a man of Rubens's intelligence and trustworthiness; the commission of the queen-mother, the time he had to spend in Paris to finish and hang the pictures, averted suspicion, while it presented an excellent opportunity for observing what was going

<sup>1</sup> As compensation for this misfortune, and as a recognition of his devotion, Ophovius was appointed Bishop of Bar-le-Duc shortly after his release.

on at court, and dissimulating the measures that in agreement with the Infanta, it was judged advisable to take. But in spite of all precautions, the secret could not be entirely preserved. De Baugy, the French ambassador at Brussels, had penetrated it even before Rubens went to Paris. In a despatch to D'Ocquerre, the secretary of state, on August 30, 1624, the following passage occurs: "The proposals of a truce are not displeasing to the Infanta, from whichever side they come; she listens daily to such suggestions made her by



LOT AND HIS FAMILY LEAVING SODOM.

(The Louvre.)

Rubens, the celebrated Antwerp painter, known at Paris for the pictures he is painting for the queen-mother's palace, He has been to and fro between this place and Spinola's camp, giving out that he has some particular understanding with Prince Henry of Nassau, who is well inclined towards a truce; by that means he thinks that he would preserve his fortune, and the Prince of Orange that he would secure repose for his old age." In another despatch, dated September 13, Baugy returns to the subject: "The painter Rubens is in town; the Infanta has commissioned a portrait of the Prince of Poland from him. He will, I imagine, be more successful there than in the negotiations



for the truce, a matter to which he can only give superficial shade and colour without real substance or foundation."



HENRY IV. RECEIVING THE PORTRAIT OF MARIE DE' MEDICI.  
(The Louvre.)

The position was most delicate, and on his arrival in Paris Rubens quickly saw that his safest course lay in allying himself with the Baron de Vicq that they might not embarrass each other's operations.

He informed the Infanta in a long letter dated March 15, 1625, how a certain De Bye, a treasury clerk at Brussels, had made a pretence of entering on negotiations. But in his opinion it was useless just then to hope anything from France, who, believing it to her interest to oppose a truce, would do her best to keep up the hostilities, and diminish the power of Spain by thus immobilising her disposable resources. Rubens apologised for speaking so frankly, begged the princess to keep the secret, and in conclusion, fearing possible disclosures, implored her to burn his letter.

It is not necessary for us to accompany Rubens in the political complications which occupied him during his visit to Paris ; we need only note the passages in his correspondence that are characteristic of his conduct and opinions. Although he had not entered into politics from personal predilection, but at the suggestion of the Infanta, the step once taken, he neglected no means of making himself useful, and at the same time of advancing his own fortunes. Conscious of his superior merit, he was not accustomed to take a subordinate place, but he never descended to any doubtful proceeding in order to demonstrate his value. The nations of Europe were then so disunited that it was essential for each to have as many allies as her enemies. The victory was to him who could best deceive his neighbours or turn their defections to account. Negotiations were tortuous and contradictory, and crossed each other at every turn ; while treating with one side, absolutely contrary propositions were received or secretly agreed to from the other. Rubens's sagacious and far-sighted mind quickly saw what was essential, and he never, like the rest, lost the right track or followed devious paths. He sank his own individuality in serving his employers to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to discover his real opinions. But while he conformed to his instructions he tried to improve them if he thought that they were unwise, and, while carefully observing the respect due to his employers, boldly stated his own opinion. His style is strong and precise, even through the most polite circumlocutions, and he says clearly what he means. He knew, and the fact does honour to both of them, that the Infanta placed entire confidence in him. His

authority increased to such an extent that professional diplomatists became jealous of him. They were annoyed at the advent of an intruder into affairs the management of which should, they considered, be left entirely to them; they tried to oust him, and sought opportunities of injuring and humiliating him.

But, apart from his superior intelligence, his profession gave him a marked advantage. His talent as a painter had procured him access to the Court, and the very subjects he was commissioned to paint afforded him opportunities for studying the attitude of the different parties into which the Court was divided. While painting Marie de' Medici's portrait, he came to know her more intimately. He conversed with her during the sittings, and discreetly led the conversation to what subjects he pleased. One of the portraits painted then remained in his possession, either because he wished to retouch the background which he had merely sketched, or because he intended to use it in the pictures for the Henry IV. gallery. It figures in the inventory made at his death, and was purchased for the King of Spain. The Queen, who is nearly full face, wears a black dress, and is seated in a black arm-chair. Her fair hair, sprinkled with grey, is drawn up from her forehead, and forms a delightful frame to the fresh, ruddy flesh-tints of her face. It is difficult to believe that Marie de' Medici was then over fifty. The simple pose, the intelligent, kindly eyes, the calm, gentle expression, and the dignity of the countenance, give the portrait exquisite charm: hanging in the chief room of the Prado, it has nothing to fear from the proximity of the masterpieces of Titian, Velasquez, and Van Dyck.

Amid his various employments and great press of work, Rubens always remained master of himself, and was able to give the most diverse pictures the exact character they demanded. In Marie de' Medici's portrait the execution is supple, delicately modelled, and dainty in colour, while that of the *Portrait of the Baron de Vicq* is firm, vivacious, and resolute. In the small picture of *Lot's Flight*, signed by Rubens, and dated 1625, the touch on the other hand is exceedingly skilful and elaborate. The composition is somewhat elementary; the figures are juxtaposed rather than artistically grouped,

and cut the panel into a number of vertical divisions; the colour is slightly gaudy. But the neutral blues or browns of the architecture, the sky, and the landscape temper the mixture of tones, and ensure a general harmony. The figures at either end—the fair-haired angel, and the young woman carrying a basket of fruit on her head with a superb gesture—have a perfect grace, and are painted with a facile and skilful brush.

It would seem that Rubens rested from one sort of work by taking up another: without undue haste, he accomplished all he undertook. The Medici pictures were finished at the time appointed, and the Princess Henrietta was able to satisfy her desire of seeing them before her departure for England. The artist was present at her marriage, which took place in Notre Dame on May 11, 1625. Two days later, writing to his friend Peiresc, he related an accident of which he had nearly been a victim, and in which M. de Valavès, Peiresc's brother, was slightly wounded. They took up their position on a platform reserved for the English Ambassador's suite, in order to get a better view of the ceremony. It broke down under the weight of the spectators; Rubens was at the end, and when the crash came, managed to support himself against the platform next it. But Valavès, and about thirty others, were thrown to the ground. No one was seriously injured, and Rubens, who had seen the invalid, felt sure that there was no cause for anxiety. "As for himself, his personal affairs entailed some amount of worry, for it was scarcely possible to pay much attention to them, amid the distractions of the Court, without risk of being importunate and indiscreet towards the Queen." He was, however, desirous of settling the business, in order to be able to leave Paris before Whitsuntide, the time fixed for Madame's departure. "The Queen-mother was much pleased with the gallery pictures, and had told him so herself over and over again." The King had also visited the gallery. It was the first time he had been to the Palace, and those present<sup>1</sup> reported that he expressed himself much delighted with the pictures. The Abbé of St. Ambroise related, "how, when explaining the subjects, he invented ingenious methods of hiding the true meanings." The *Prosperity of the Regency*, painted to replace the *Queen Leaving*

<sup>1</sup> Rubens was kept at home by an accident to his foot.

*Paris*, was specially admired; the general character of the subject could offend no one. "I am sure," continued Rubens, "that if instead



THE MARRIAGE OF MARIE DE' MEDICI AT FLORENCE.

(The Louvre.)

of the scheme made by the Court, the choice of subjects had been left entirely to me, no one need have feared scandals or equivocal comments; a thing (he wrote in the margin) which the Cardinal discovered

too late, and he was much troubled to find that the newly chosen subjects gave offence. I greatly fear," he added, "that I shall have the same difficulty with the subjects for the other gallery (that of Henry IV.). If only they would give me a free hand, nothing could be easier, for such abundant and splendid material would suffice for the decoration of ten galleries. But, although I have notified my views to the Cardinal by letter, he is so absorbed in affairs of State, that he has not found time to see me." And mentioning later<sup>1</sup> his difficulty in obtaining access to the Cardinal, Rubens added, "I have had enough of this Court; if I am not paid with the same punctuality that I have practised towards the Queen, it is possible (this is between ourselves) that I shall not revisit it, although, to speak the truth, I have so far no reason to complain of her Majesty, for the delay is excused by legitimate obstacles. But, meanwhile, time passes, and to my great sorrow I am kept from home."

It is clear that Rubens was unable to gain access to the Cardinal as he wished; and, reading between the lines of his letter, it would seem that he did not believe that Richelieu regarded him with much favour. The future showed that Rubens's fears were well founded, and it is not surprising that Richelieu, with his well organised system of espionage, was kept informed of the painter's manœuvres. By an entirely unforeseen set of circumstances, Rubens, during the last part of his visit to Paris, appeared to justify the surveillance and the prejudices of which he was the object.

The Duke of Buckingham was sent to Paris by Charles I. to bring home his bride, and the fact that immediately on his arrival at Paris on May 25 he sought the artist, seems to show that he was from the first favourable to an alliance with Spain. According to De Piles, it was in order to be able to discuss the matter without rousing suspicion that Buckingham asked Rubens to paint his portrait during the few days in which they were to be together in Paris. In addition to the life-like sketch in the Albertina collection, the master painted a three-quarters length portrait, almost full face, and at the Duke's entreaty, a large equestrian portrait with allegorical figures—Fame hovering in the air, and at the back, on the sea, Neptune and Amphitrite with

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Dupuy, October 22, 1626.



*Martyrdom of St. Stephen.*

(THE HERMITAGE.)





Printed by Draeger, Paris.



ships.<sup>1</sup> The first of these portraits is timid, the second stiff and lifeless. Rubens was doubtless desirous of pleasing his noble sitter, but he was unable evidently to give his full attention to the work : while he painted he had to weigh his words carefully, and to store up in his memory what was said to him, so as to make an exact report to the Infanta. But the work was lucrative, for besides the sum of 500 pounds sterling he received from the Duke, the French Court presented him with a gratuity of 2,000 gold crowns. It is also probable that Buckingham then broached to Rubens his desire of purchasing the master's collections; and it would seem that in so doing he had a double end in view : to gratify his own tastes, and to make sure of the artist's favourable support in the negotiations in which he was to intervene.

During this visit, Rubens, in his leisure time, went to see the royal collection of pictures at Fontainebleau, works by Raphael, Michael Angelo and Leonardo, among others. Cassiano del Pozzo, a great friend of Peiresc and Rubens, tells us in his account of a journey made as a member of the suite of the Cardinal Fr. Barberini, the Pope's legate, that the *Gioconda*, which was then in the collection<sup>2</sup> excited Buckingham's admiration to such an extent that he indiscreetly expressed a desire to possess it. Thereupon it was represented to Lewis XIII. that it was one of the most valuable pictures in the gallery, and he ordered it to be taken down and put aside. The Duke, his hopes defeated, could not refrain from mentioning his disappointment to several persons, among others, to Rubens. Did Rubens during this visit to Fontainebleau copy one of the cartoons of Giulio Romano's *Triumphal Procession of Scipio* and several frescoes by a painter, Primaticcio, with whose work he had become familiar at Mantua, and whose somewhat mannered charm and elegance greatly attracted him? It is impossible to say, because the drawings for these frescoes, now destroyed, were in Jabach's collection, and it may have been at Paris, at Jabach's house, that Rubens made a sketch of the drawing for the *Rape of Helen* (now in the Albertina collection), another of the *Rape of Hylas by the Nymphs* (it was sold in 1741

<sup>1</sup> The portrait is now in the possession of the Earl of Jersey.

<sup>2</sup> It is now, as every one knows, in the Louvre.

in the Crozat collection), and two vivacious sketches wholly by his own hand of the ceiling, *Phæbus and Diana in their Chariots*.<sup>1</sup>



THE BIRTH OF LEWIS XIII.

(The Louvre.)

When Rubens perceived how slowly matters were progressing, he

<sup>1</sup> One is in Prince Liechtenstein's collection, and the other in that of M. Léon Bonnat. We give a reproduction on page 229, Vol. I.

determined to return to Flanders. The journey was not agreeable, for unable to find post-horses in the neighbourhood of Paris, he had to drive



THE MAJORITY OF LEWIS XIII.

(The Louvre.)

for four relays "poor, half-dead beasts walking single file, led by the postillions after the manner of muleteers." He reached home on June 12, 1625; and the same evening hastened to write to Peiresc,

that the day before at Brussels he had tried in vain to see the Infanta, and hoping to catch her at Antwerp, he had immediately set forward for the town, to find that the Princess had left at six in the morning to testify her satisfaction to her army at the capitulation of Breda. Rubens apologised for his inability to furnish his friend with more details, since his house was filled with a crowd of relatives and friends come to congratulate him on his return.

But his affairs in Paris seemed as far from a settlement as ever. In his letter he continued to complain of fresh delays in the payments, in spite of formal promises. He had every right to expect greater punctuality, for he had presented to the treasurer, d'Argouges, whose business it was to settle the payments, a large picture, with which he appeared much delighted. But for the Duke of Buckingham's generosity, the great work executed for the Queen would have been very onerous to him, on account of his journeys and his residences in Paris, for which he had not been indemnified. He was not more fortunate with the king than with the queen-mother; for, in a later letter,<sup>1</sup> he remarked on the neglect to pay him for "the tapestry cartoons executed at his Majesty's bidding." Here again we find traces of the orderly mind that is one of Rubens's most striking characteristics. Invariably punctual in all his engagements, lack of the quality in others distressed him, and in his intercourse with great persons, he was subjected to much annoyance of this kind.

But Rubens was careful not to complain too loudly, because now that the Medici Gallery was finished, he wanted to make sure of the paintings for the Henry IV. Gallery, a commission that would give him an opportunity of displaying his genius, unfettered by the restraints imposed upon him in the former task. Those restraints weighed on him heavily; and perhaps the scant appreciation which we now give to one of the master's chief works is accounted for by the abuse of allegory to which he was forced to pay so large a tribute. In criticising the pictures we ought to take into consideration the conditions under

<sup>1</sup> To Valavès, February 26, 1626.

which they were painted. We judge them somewhat contemptuously as a whole, forgetting that there are necessary distinctions to be made between them. We ought first of all to note in a general way the breadth of conception, the brilliance and the decorative qualities that Rubens manifests throughout the whole series. Although he was not permitted to choose the episodes best suited to his genius, he certainly succeeded in turning to account the most picturesque sides of the unpromising scheme to which he had to conform.

In any endeavour to select the pictures in the series that do justice to his genius, it is well to set aside the purely allegorical compositions in which the mythological divinities play the chief part. Such are *The Three Fates spinning the Fortunes of Marie de' Medici*, the *Birth of Marie de' Medici*, and her *Education*; in the last, Félibien is careful to point out the "young man playing the bass-viol, to show that a child ought to be taught from the first to bring harmony into the passions, and to regulate the actions of life with order and moderation in earliest youth." We must candidly confess, that without previous warning, the spectator would find a difficulty in recognising the *Government of the Queen* in the *Triumph of Truth*, or her *Interview with her Son* in the *Assembly of the Gods on Olympus*. In the *Journey to the Bridge of Cé*, Rubens had to represent actual events, but the composition is no more sympathetic; it is a pupil's work, only slightly retouched by the master, in which the queen, mounted on a white horse, wears a somewhat ridiculous plumed helmet; nor does the curious painting, the *Exchange of the two Princesses*, in which the figures, that symbolise France and Spain are symmetrically arranged on either side, appeal to us. The scene is placed above the ground, and seems to anticipate the choregraphic entertainments planned for Lewis XIV. by his masters of the ballet. The *Reconciliation of the Queen with her Son* is still more unattractive. Mercury, entirely nude, bearing the olive branch, with all the airs of a gallant, advances towards the queen, who is accompanied by the Cardinals La Valette and La Rochefoucauld in their purple robes; the

episode has somewhat the air of a practical joke, and the vulgar, robust figure of the god adds to the unseemliness of such promiscuity.

In the allegorical figures so unsuitably introduced into these compositions, Rubens seemed regardless of that distinction which the artists of the Renaissance, and still more those of antiquity, gave to those types of strength and beauty by which they typified the graces or the energies of nature. The nudities painted by Rubens remained essentially Flemish, although inspired by Italy. Whether the subject is mythological or sacred, without looking too closely, Rubens chooses from the ever inexhaustible material at his disposal, river-gods of massive build and ruddy flesh tints, Olympian Christs, and beautiful, plump, solidly built girls, who, distinguished solely by their attributes, represent in turn Plenty or Wisdom, Lucina or a Naiad. But, commonplace as the figures are, the artist endows them with action and life; he observes them and makes them live, he breathes his powerful inspiration into the artificial world which his wonderful fertility enabled him to invent. In the *Majority of Lewis XIII.*, for example, observe the four strong wenches, rowing with all the vigour of their muscular arms. If it were not for the labels under each, which in the form of rebuses tell us that they personify Strength, Religion, Faith, and Justice, we should feel sure that we were looking at some of the Antwerp boatwomen, robust, strong-limbed viragoes, capable of taking their craft across the Scheldt in a hurricane.

Generally speaking, Rubens was better inspired in historical subjects than in those that were abstract and purely symbolical; but his versatile genius disconcerts by the surprising variety and wealth of his creations. While *Henry IV. setting out for the Wars in Germany* is a cold, stiff composition, harsh in handling and dull and subdued in colour, the *Prosperity of the Regency*, in some degree improvised and hastily painted at Paris, is one of his most exquisite works. We cannot deny that in this glorification of a government under which France suffered rather than prospered, allegory abounds



in its tritest forms ; neither can we assert that the scheme Rubens proposed to himself was particularly attractive. He desired to represent "the flourishing condition of the kingdom and the elevation of science and art through the liberality and magnificence of her Majesty, who, seated on a shining throne, holds scales in her hand to show that her prudence and uprightness keep the world evenly balanced."<sup>1</sup> But we scarcely think of the subject, or rather how it could be better expressed, before the radiant brilliance of the canvas, in which we do not know



THE CORONATION OF MARIE DE MEDICI.  
Sketch for the Medici Gallery. (Munich Gallery.)

whether to admire most the grand arrangement of the decoration, the triumphal splendour of the colour, or the original, delicate, and distinguished handling.

The *Peace Concluded* is even more expressive in its austerity. Rubens here achieves a striking eloquence by simple methods, and purposely restrained colouring. He reveals the resources of his art more evidently by intentionally reducing the usual richness of his palette. Other pictures in the series, less perfectly beautiful, contain delightful passages. In *Henry IV. receiving the Portrait*

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Peiresc, May 13, 1625.

XXIV

*Landing of Marie de' Medici.*

(Sketch for the Medici Gallery.)

(MUNICH GALLERY.)



Cliché Hanfstaengl

Printed by Chassepot, Paris (France)



would have dealt strictly with realities, and would have been of little interest.<sup>1</sup> It is also to be noticed how happily inspired Rubens was in revising the original arrangement which is shown in the Munich sketch reproduced here. The ship, seen obliquely, has a more unexpected effect, and leaves more importance to the central episode; more balance is given to the composition by placing the gangway between the vessel and the quay, in a more horizontal position. By means of such judicious changes, the master strengthened the framework of the composition, and then proceeded to give it life, animation, and inimitable brilliance of colouring. The purple carpets, the gilded ship, which contemporary memoirs delight to celebrate, the luxurious equipment, the glaucous transparence of the sea, and the white foam of the waves, are a most excellent accompaniment to the ruddy, tawny bodies of the Tritons, and the pearly flesh-tints of the nereids who abandon themselves to the caprices of the waves. The flowing lines of the foreground, and its wealth of colouring, do not distract attention from the upper part, but, on the contrary, help to fix it on the figure of the queen, who stands out from the other personages. Dressed in white, she leaves the ship, and proudly approaches the canopy embroidered with the royal lilies, under which—to supply the place of Henry IV. amusing himself in the society of his mistress—France and Religion invite her to take her seat.

The figure of Marie de' Medici, in the *Marriage at Florence*, is even more noble; her sense of the greatness to which she is called is well expressed, when, as the affianced bride of Henry IV., she receives the ring which her uncle, Duke Ferdinand de' Medici, puts on her finger in the name of her future husband. Rubens was present at the ceremony, and remembered its smallest details. Everything in the picture is scrupulously exact, except the little genius, who, torch in hand, carries the train of the wedding gown, and Rubens presents historical truth with

<sup>1</sup> In a letter, now lost, Rubens asked before he went to Paris that the sisters Capaño of the Rue de Vertbois, and also their niece Louisa, might be engaged for him, for he intended them to furnish him with "three life-size studies of nereids." But their "magnificent black hair," that it was "difficult to find elsewhere," does not appear on any of his nereids; two have fair, and the other red-brown hair.

both authority and charm. It is difficult, even when we take into consideration the perfection at which he had already arrived, and the many masterpieces he was yet to produce, to find in all his works a figure to be compared with the Marie de' Medici of this picture. Dressed in a white gown embroidered with gold, the crown on her head, already regarded as Queen of France by her family, she stands before the altar, and with a regal gesture, offers her hand to Henry IV.'s representative with the mixture of dignity, reserve, and charm, that high-born Italian women naturally put into such simple actions.

O obeying the wishes of Marie de' Medici, Rubens determined to develop the episode of the *Coronation at St. Denis*, an event that marked the zenith of her adventurous life. Art, as a rule, is incapable of reproducing such ceremonials: the arrangement of such pictures is generally over-crowded, lacking in interest, incoherent and lifeless. But Rubens overcame the difficulties of his subject apparently without effort. Accuracy and vivacity of effect, perfect knowledge of values, the transparency of even the darkest shadows, the extreme diversity of the types, are all foreseen, and expressed with ease and certainty.

The greatest merit of this large canvas is the brilliant and harmonious colour. Blue predominates in the general harmony, a seductive tint, but one that requires the most delicate handling when it has to cover a large surface. This fact did not disconcert Rubens, he quickly discovered the contrasts that would enhance the value of the colours to which he wished to give the greatest brilliance. To avoid the coldness that so much blue would give to the general effect, he made the shadows very dark, mixing them generously with brown, and enlivening them with bold reflected lights; a varied scale of yellows everywhere contrasts with the blues, and makes the colours vibrate in harmony. A few bold reds discreetly distributed, and enhanced by the whites of the ermine and of the dress of the young dauphin, by the grey harmonies of the collars, and the still deeper greys of the architecture, add to the richness of the general effect.

It was indeed a new art, and one which had at that moment small chance of finding an appreciative public in France. The satisfaction of the court was due more to the nature of the subjects than to the talent with which they were represented. The artist had not a very high opinion of the queen-mother's taste in painting; according to him she understood nothing about it (letter to Dupuy, January 27, 1628), although according to de Piles "she drew very creditably." Nor can we attach more importance to the criticism of Rubens's pictures which occurs in a description of the Luxembourg Palace in Latin



THE CORONATION OF MARIE DE' MEDICI.  
(The Louvre.)

verse, published in 1628 under the title of *Porticus Medicæa*,<sup>1</sup> with a dedication to Cardinal Richelieu. The author, a scholar named Claude Morisot, writing in a heavy and affected style, endeavours to overwhelm the influential persons of the time with flattery, rather than to appreciate the master's pictures.

It was more than half a century before the Medici Gallery was properly appreciated. Rubens certainly found in de Piles a warm admirer of his genius. Believing, as he said, "that he had discovered the merit of the great man who had hitherto been regarded as a painter

<sup>1</sup> 4to. Paris. Fr. Targa.

little above mediocrity," de Piles was keen to show his appreciation. "It is easy to see," he exclaims enthusiastically, "that Italy has not yet produced any artist who possesses all the qualifications for painting. Now Rubens does possess them all, not only with the utmost certainty and with strict observance of rule, but especially by the superiority and universality of his genius." In his *Dialogue sur le Coloris*, he allows him greater excellence, saying, "the best advice I can give painters is to look once a week for a year at the Luxembourg Gallery; that day would be better employed than any other in the week." In this essay which, following the fashion of the time, is in dialogue form, Damon, a man of accommodating disposition, timidly ventures some strictures on the exaggeration of the lights and colours in Rubens's pictures, which are very far from being an imitation of nature, and have a theatrical "effect." "Oh! what a fine theatrical effect," replied de Piles himself under the name of Pamphilis. "Would to God that all the pictures painted to-day were treated in the same style! Nature, herself is harsh, and any one who tries to copy her simply as she is, without artifice, will produce something paltry and in poor taste. What you call exaggeration is the splendid dexterity that makes the painted objects more real than real ones."

De Piles had a less subservient opponent in a contemporary, André Félibien, who, though not unjust to Rubens, was more sensible of the beauties of Italian art, which he had learned to appreciate when living at Rome in close intimacy with Póussin. In his *Entretiens sur les Vies et les Ouvrages des plus excellents Peintres*, which form a sort of reply to de Piles's *Dialogues*, he criticises Rubens's abuse of allegory in vigorous and sensible terms. The passage is worth quotation. "All painters," says Tymandre, "are so accustomed to treat profane subjects, that no matter how learned and judicious they are, few hesitate to mingle fable with the most serious and Christian subjects. For what, pray, have Cupid, Hymen, Mercury, the Graces, Tritons, and Nereids to do with the history of Henry IV. and Marie de' Medici? And what connection is there between the divinities of mythology, the ceremonies of the church, and our customs





*The Old Woman with the Candle.*

(Fac-simile of an Engraving by Rubens from the proof signed by him.)

(NATIONAL LIBRARY, PARIS.)



in Penology. *Quis vult appropio Lumen de Lumine tolli (ex p. m. l. b.)*  
 Regis Christianissimi *Mille licet capiant deprimis Indes nihil Regis (Abd.)*  
 et ordinem confederat. *PP Rubric. Janus d. c. d. d.*

Printed by Draeger, Paris.



that they should be joined and confused together, as by Rubens in the works you have just mentioned?" "You touch there an abuse," I replied, "which ought to be firmly opposed, and it is a thing that Rubens ought to have avoided more than others, for he was a man of culture." Félibien is perfectly right, and the criticism is judicious and moderate. There is some truth, but also some exaggeration, in the criticism contained in the following extract, where Félibien, after doing full justice to Rubens's colouring, "which is his chief talent," adds: "It cannot be denied that Rubens failed conspicuously in respect to the beauty of his figures, and often even in his drawing. His genius did not allow him to rectify what he had once produced; he never thought of giving a dignified expression of the head to his figures, nor gracefulness to his outlines, which are frequently spoiled by his carelessness of manner. . . . His exceedingly free method of painting reveals more dexterity than accuracy in many pictures where nature ought to be exactly represented. . . . Although he valued the antique and Raphael's works highly, he does not seem to have tried to imitate either." Félibien clearly refers to de Piles, although he does not name him, and he tries to discount his opinion when, acknowledging "his having spoken with care and eloquence of Rubens's great talents," he observes that "the love he showed for that artist to the detriment of others more excellent, detracts from his authority on things concerning painting." The two authors were sincere, and vivaciously defended their opinions. They both, moreover, discerned Rubens's qualities and defects with a judgment scarcely to be expected in France at that time. If we ascribe their views to partiality, it must not be forgotten that two artists of modern France held much the same opinions: the obstinate antipathy of Ingres to Rubens is well known, while Delacroix almost worshipped him.

We should also remember when discussing Rubens's exaggerated fondness for allegory, that it was shared by his contemporaries, and that the conditions imposed on him greatly contributed to its abuse in the Medici pictures. He would have had less recourse to it if he had

been left free to treat a less ungrateful subject. His great desire to paint the Henry IV. gallery, for which he thought the material "splendid and abundant," shows that he reckoned on compensation from the inspiration of a life rich in events of a different kind. But as we shall see, the project did not advance, and after many delays and vexations, Rubens was compelled to give it up.



PORTRAIT OF THE BARON DE VICQ.

(The Louvre.)



STUDY OF CHERUBS.  
(Weimar Museum.)  
(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)

### CHAPTER III.

VISIT OF THE INFANTA ISABELLA AND OF SPINOLA TO RUBENS: HE PAINTS THEIR PORTRAITS—RUBENS'S DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS—HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH PEIRESC, VALAVÈS, AND DUPUY—PRINCIPAL WORKS OF THIS PERIOD: THE "ST. ROCH OF ALOST"; THE "CONVERSION OF ST. BAVON"; THE "MIRACLES OF ST. BENEDICT"; THE "ADORATION OF THE MAGI"; AND THE "ASSUMPTION"—DEATH OF ISABELLA BRANT (1626)—INVENTORY OF RUBENS'S PROPERTY, AND SALE OF HIS COLLECTIONS TO THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM—HIS GRIEF AT HIS WIFE'S DEATH.



PLATE FROM THE DRAWING BOOK.  
(From an Engraving by P. Pontius after Rubens.)

IN the intervals of his journeys to France and his enforced residence at Paris, while painting the pictures for the Medici Gallery, Rubens must have longed to resume the quiet life at Antwerp that suited both his tastes and his occupations. But this period of his existence was much disturbed and filled with various anxieties. Plunged involuntarily into politics, he gave more and more of his attention to

them; and the Infanta Isabella, who well knew the value of his devotion to her, placed an increasing trust in his counsels. On

the incessant rain had, at this date, made the sending of the convoys very difficult ; and he also spoke of the Prince of Orange's plans for relieving the town. In the following letter, (December 26), he acknowledged the receipt of the "*Letters of Duplessis-Mornay*," which he had read with great pleasure, and arranged to send shortly Jacques Chifflet's book, "*Sur l'Authenticité du Linceul de Jésus Christ conservé à Besançon*." He also put at Peiresc's disposal a drawing of a mummy<sup>1</sup> which he arranged to send later in a case with some pictures. On the 3rd July, 1625, writing to Valavès, he told him that at Aleander's request he sent him some engravings after cameos, asking him not to show them, as he had not had time to retouch them. Besides the reproductions of two large cameos they include "that of a magnificent and important triumphal car with four horses, which, contrary to custom, are seen from in front, with numerous interesting details, on the subject of which he would like to have Aleander's opinion, and also the name of the emperor, which seemed to him to resemble Theodosius more than any other ; the other details might well apply to Aurelian or to Probus."<sup>2</sup>

Rubens, as we see, was deeply interested in everything that referred to archæology. During his visits to Paris he examined in his leisure time the rich collections of antique works of art which were then to be found there. He could not have had a better guide than Peiresc, who, in 1623, had been the first to give a correct interpretation of the famous *Sainte Chapelle Cameo*, representing the *Apotheosis of Augustus*, and also of the *Gemma Augustæ*.<sup>3</sup> At the request of his friend, Rubens, who had copied these cameos, had engravings of them executed at Antwerp. It was, in fact, discussed whether Peiresc, Aleander, Cassiano del Pozzo, Rockox, and Rubens himself should not together undertake the publication of a series of plates after the most remarkable antiques of which Rubens had

<sup>1</sup> This mummy is preserved to the present day at the house of one of Rubens's descendants.

<sup>2</sup> In reality, the cameo in question, which is in the medal room of the National Library Paris, represents the "Triumph of Licinius."

<sup>3</sup> The first of these cameos is also in the medal room of the National Library, Paris, the second is in the Vienna Gallery.





XXV

*Conversion of St. Bazon.*

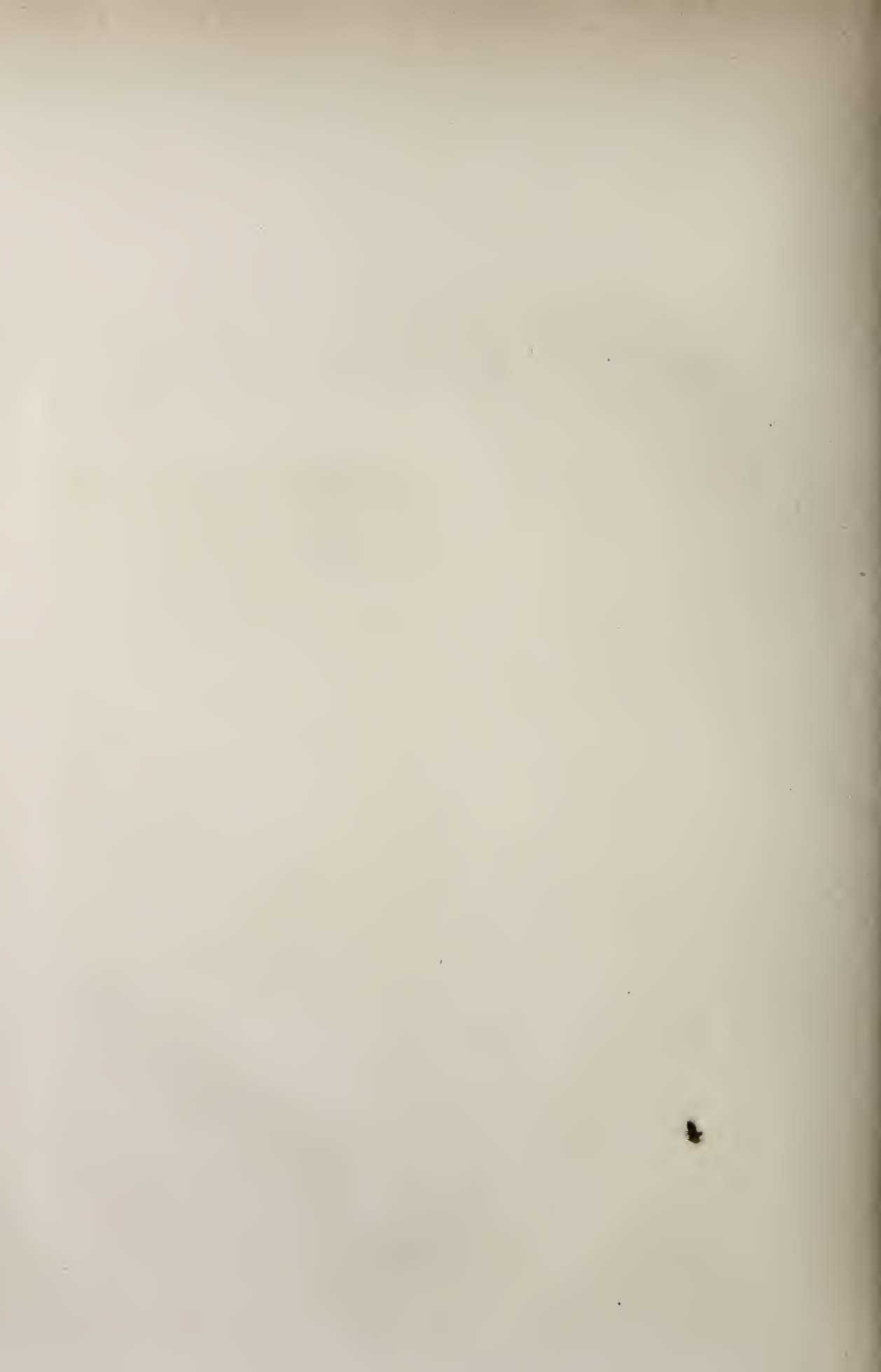
(NATIONAL GALLERY.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)



Cliché Braun, Clément et C.<sup>ie</sup>

Printed by Chassepot Paris (France)



drawings, or which formed part of his collection. In the postscript of his letter of July 3, he gave Valavès an account of Rockox's views regarding the publication: "I found him," he says, "willing to assist, but on the condition that the idea had some chance of success. He is a worthy man, well versed in antiquities, and his commentaries would be very useful, and do us honour. But I know him to be a man who would only pledge himself within well-defined limits, as regards both co-operation and expense. He is rich and childless, but prudent and economical; withal a man of means rejoicing in an irreproachable reputation, as your brother Peiresc, who knows him personally, can testify. I should like you, therefore, to inform him of the contents of this letter, and also Aleander, for we have real need of assistance if we are to pilot our enterprise safely." The project was formed, abandoned, and then taken up again, but never carried out, at least, by Rubens. There exists a series of eight plates with



PORTRAIT OF A MAN.

(From a Drawing in the Dresden Gallery.)

a frontispiece, engraved in view of this publication by Vorsterman, P. Pontius, and Nicolas Ryckemans, after drawings by the master; but although he furnished the elements, he had nothing to do with the execution. M. Max Rooses wisely remarks that the title alone, with its barbarous orthography,—"*Varie figueri de Agati antique desiniati de Peetro Paulo Rubbenie,*" is proof enough of this.

Other passages from the correspondence increase our knowledge of Rubens's character, and of the rectitude of his opinions.

Valavès mentioned the duelling mania which then prevailed in France among men of high rank. Rubens stated his opinion on the subject. He thought "it would be well to put an end to a mania that is the pest of this kingdom, and the ruin of the brilliant French nobility." "With us," he adds, "being at war with an enemy without, we consider him the bravest who distinguishes himself most in the service of his sovereign, and if any one shows an inclination for such folly, he is banished from the court, and despised by all. Her most serene Highness the Infanta and the Marquis resolutely intend to render these private quarrels disgraceful and odious. Thus, those who think to make themselves important by so acting are excluded from all offices and military honours, and this seems to me to be the most efficient remedy, for these misplaced paroxysms of anger are solely caused by ambition and a false love of glory." In another letter to Valavès, on February 26, 1626, Rubens returned to the subject, declaring that the edict against duellists, and the announcement that the delinquents would not be pardoned, was the only remedy for so incorrigible a madness; he would like to have a copy of the edict. In the same letter he asked his correspondent if he could procure him a publication by Father Mariana:—" *Traité des choses qui sont dignes d'amendement de la Compagnie des Jésuites*" (Paris, 1625). Valavès had given him the book in Paris, and a Jesuit of Antwerp, Father A. Schott, had immediately asked him to lend it him for a few days; but the Father Superior, finding him with it, confiscated the volume, and severely reprimanded him. As Rubens would not be able to get his copy back, he wished for another, in Spanish rather than in French. Not that he felt any pleasure at hearing ill of the Jesuits, for he was always on the best terms with them. In fact, the year before, he designed the decoration of the ceiling of the Lady Chapel of their church at Antwerp, the drawing for which, reproduced here (p. 100, Vol. I.), is in the Albertina collection. It was evidently intended to serve as a model to the sculptors entrusted with the decoration, and Rubens displayed the elegant facility of his talent by the happy arrangement of the ceiling, and by the ease with which the figures, very ingeniously distributed, are adapted to the circular or rectangular spaces which they fill.

About the same time Rubens, learning that the Parliament had

condemned a book by Father Santarel,—who had declared that the Pope had the right to depose not only heretical sovereigns, but incapable ones—hastened to inform the Jesuits of Antwerp of the decree. They “had not heard of it, and were greatly mortified; but I can assure you,” he wrote to Valavès, “that rather than lose afresh this fair kingdom of France, which they have had such trouble in recovering, the Fathers will accept any conditions, and will not dream of raising any difficulty.”<sup>1</sup>

But if he had a horror of gossip and libels,—and he often expressed himself frankly on the subject—he had a profound love of truth. It shines through all his actions, and is seen in his opinions of his friends. His kindly and affectionate disposition led him to look at their best sides; but on occasion his keen intellect showed them to him as they were. In the description of Rockox quoted above, he painted him to the life as a man of scrupulous integrity, who, though truly generous at heart, liked to know exactly how far he was pledging himself. He described Buckingham with similar impartiality. If he had personal reasons for praising his noble bearing and his generosity, he criticised his adventurous policy with severity and insight. He pitied the young King of England; for, by Buckingham's influence, hostilities with Spain were about to be renewed. The haughty, capricious favourite was hurrying king and country to destruction; his evil counsel was leading the sovereign gratuitously to that end, for even if war can be declared at will, no one has sufficient power to terminate it when or as he pleases.

But Rubens knew how to be frank and discreet at the same time, and always remembered to whom he was speaking; with every appearance of candour, he kept guard over his tongue with perfect tact. Although he had very real grievances against the French Court, and the events of this time lent themselves easily to criticism, he avoided passing any opinion on them when he thought his criticism might hurt the feelings of those whom he was addressing. His correspondence is a model of natural wit and knowledge, of charming grace and sound sense; and we can fully understand his friends' pleasure at

<sup>1</sup> Rubens was not mistaken; the Father Superior Cotton and the representatives of the Order at Paris publicly disavowed Santarel's doctrines.

receiving his letters, and their desire to pass them on to one another. He liked to receive information about subjects that interested him, and to exchange ideas with people who understood him. Valavès, before leaving Paris, was anxious to find some one among his intimate friends who could continue to inform Rubens of what was doing at Court, and among men of letters and scholars.



STUDY FOR THE "ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS" IN THE ROUEN MUSEUM  
(Albertina Collection.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)

From the first letter that the artist wrote to Pierre Dupuy, this new correspondent, we learn that Valavès's choice was in every way the best he could have made. As far as his work permitted, Rubens, during a very long period, never failed to write to Dupuy at least once a week. Nor did he neglect to inform him in good time if he foresaw any delay or hindrance to the regularity of the correspondence. We shall often have occasion to return to these letters as a source of reliable and useful information.

We have already expressed surprise that in his busy life Rubens found time to execute the paintings for the Medici Gallery. But the homage that the Queen of France paid his genius in thus making his name more widely known, increased the number of commissions with which he was entrusted. In order to accomplish so much work, which he was often obliged to finish very quickly, he was compelled to rely more largely on the aid of pupils or collaborators. He invariably gave



them a definite sketch of the composition for their guidance, but too often had nothing to do with the actual painting. His sketches are therefore generally superior to the pictures for which they were made, and Delacroix is right when he finds them "firmer and better drawn than his large pictures." Among these, religious subjects naturally predominate; and without mentioning all Rubens's works of this class, we may note those in which he had an actual part.

The "*Adoration of the Shepherds*," which is now in the Church of the Madeleine at Lille, was painted about 1623 for the Church of the Capuchins there, and remained there until the Revolution. The artist found it a congenial subject, and he had treated it more than once already, notably in the large and somewhat commonplace canvas he finished at the end of 1619 for Duke Wolfgang von Neuberg. When he took it in hand afresh, he gave it more charm, and the character of rustic intimacy that be-



THE THREE GRACES.  
(Stockholm Museum.)

fitted it. The Virgin, it is true, is the well-known type to be found in several other productions of this period, for example, in the Madonnas of smaller dimensions which Brueghel surrounded with charming garlands of flowers. But the shepherds and peasant-women who, awkward yet respectful, approach the divine

Infant to present their humble offerings to Him, and the domestic animals, the ass and the ox, which stand by them, were certainly studies from life. In fact, about this period we find more and more frequently among Rubens's drawings, fresh, masterly studies, made in the country for use in his pictures: a country girl stooping; another carrying a basket on her head; cows resting or feeding; horses harnessed to waggons; and a crowd of picturesque details, swiftly and vividly recorded.

The *Death of Mary Magdalene*, painted for the Church of the Recollets at Ghent, and now in the Lille Museum, was most probably a work of this period. The dying saint, in a last ecstasy, is supported by two angels, who point to the heavens that open to receive her. The purposely subdued tints of the angels' draperies, the melancholy of the rocky, barren country, the pale glow of the setting sun, fading on the horizon, everything in the picture is in perfect harmony with the gravity of the subject. Rubens generally displays the greatest magnificence of colour, but he can, on occasion, be sober and austere, and express the most pathetic eloquence by the simplest means. He never imagined a more solemn or touching figure than this dying sinner; in spite of her emaciated features, her face drawn by suffering, the agitated expression of her eyes, the death-sweat on her temples, her whole appearance is radiant, as if already transfigured by celestial happiness.

P. Pontius's engraving has made the "*Saint Roch interceding for the Victims of the Plague*" famous. The picture was commissioned for the altar of the brotherhood of that saint, in the church of Alost, where it still is. The upper part is arched, and the composition is divided in the middle into two nearly equal parts: above is the saint praying Christ to assuage the terrible malady, and below are the sick imploring His assistance. But the supplicating gestures of the poor sufferers, their arms and eyes uplifted to Him by whom they hope to be healed, connect the two parts. The pose of the saint is perhaps a little theatrical, and although they are to some extent justified here by the subject, we find again in the flesh-tints of the figures of the lower group those emphatic contrasts which Rubens often accentuated too complacently. Eugène Delacroix thus refers



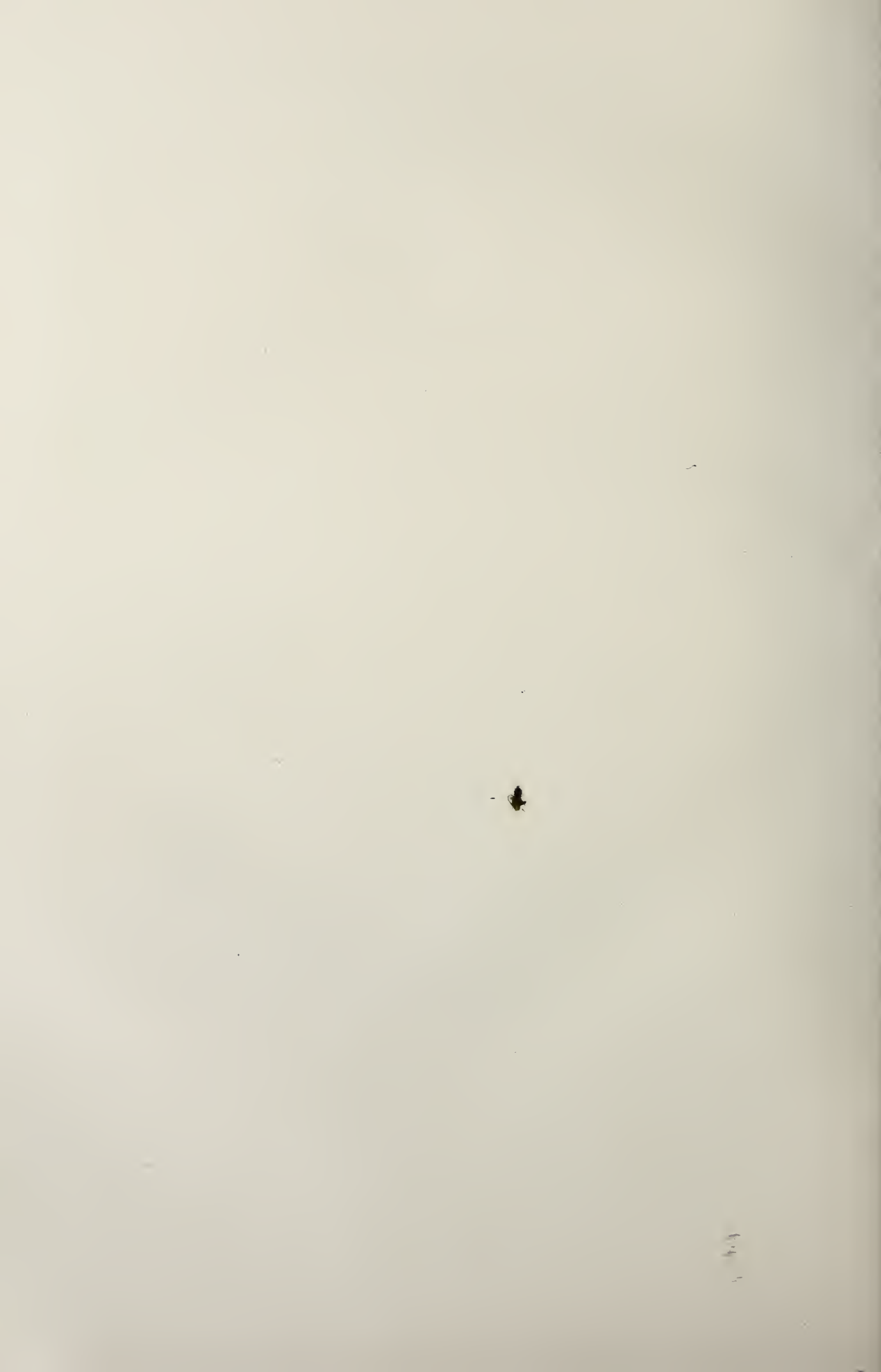
*St. Catherine.*

(Fac-simile of an Engraving by Rubens.)

(From the proof in the National Library, Paris.)



Printed by Draeger, Paris.



to this: "These fixed methods of treatment and exaggerated forms show that Rubens was in the position of a workman who plies the trade that he knows without endless seeking after perfection. He does what he knows how to do, and, consequently, without hindrance to his idea . . . . His varied, sublime ideas are interpreted by forms that superficial observers call monotonous, not to mention their other grievances. This monotony is not displeasing to a man who has penetrated the secrets of art . . . . The result is an impression of the facility with which these works have been produced; our sense of this adds to the strength of the work . . . . Rubens's execution is precise and straightforward." With an impartiality rare in his criticism of his favourite master, Delacroix here mingles blame and praise in just proportions. Let us remark, however, that if it is natural to find in Rubens those fixed methods of treatment to which, as a matter of fact, all artists tend to approach, and especially those who, like him, proceed methodically, it should be added, that he, better than any other, knew how to free himself from it on occasion, and to adopt new ideas. His reputation and the nature of his ability caused him to produce much and rapidly; he therefore never became ponderous and over-insistent in the preparation of a work, however important, and never gave his idea a definitive form from the first. His vivid intelligence enabled him to see quickly and clearly the picturesque resources of a subject, and the manner in which it should be expressed; but in frequently returning to it in other works, he discovered different and often better acceptations. Generally, too, when he imagined and approved some new arrangement, he applied it successively to similar ideas, and turned his discovery to the best possible account. Towards the time when he painted the *St. Roch* of Alost, he adopted an almost similar arrangement for two analogous subjects—the *Conversion of St. Bavon* and the *Miracles of St. Benedict*, both treated in a very decorative style with the same arrangement of the principal masses in two groups one above the other. We have spoken above<sup>1</sup> of the incidents attending the commission for the *Conversion of St. Bavon* given to Rubens by the Archbishop of Ghent, for the cathedral of that town, and of the artist's

<sup>1</sup> See page 174, Vol. I.

entreaties to the Archduke Albert to obtain formal confirmation of the commission by his intervention. Two other prelates were successively to occupy the episcopal throne before Rubens received from Antonie Triest, their successor, the long awaited sanction. The notable



PORTRAIT OF ANTONIE TRIEST, ARCHBISHOP OF GHENT.

(Mr. C. Lesser.)

differences between the sketch submitted in 1614 to the archduke,<sup>1</sup> and the picture in the Church of St. Bavon, painted in 1624,<sup>2</sup> are easily

<sup>1</sup> It is now in the National Gallery.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Brueghel gave a receipt for 600 florins, the price of this picture, which he received for his friend Rubens on September 27, 1624.



explained by the interval of ten years that separates them. In the upper part, Rubens represented St. Bavon kneeling on the threshold of a church ; he entreats two mitred abbots to admit him to their convent. Below, close to the Saint’s wife, who is accompanied by two attendants, his steward distributes alms to the poor and sick who press round him. But if the division of the composition into two distinct episodes causes a certain lack of unity, the brilliant and magnificent harmony accords admirably with the beauty of the decorations and the richness of the colour, which, thanks to recent cleaning (1895), has regained all its freshness.

The picture of the *Miracles of St. Benedict*, which belongs to the King of the Belgians, is a still more complicated composition similarly arranged. The principal episode chosen by Rubens is a little wanting in interest. Totila, King of the Huns, wishing to put St. Benedict, of whose reputation he had heard, to the test, sent one of his servants dressed in his royal robes



DEATH OF MARY MAGDALENE. (Lille Museum.)  
(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)

to Monte Cassino, under pretext of paying homage to him. But the saint discovered the deception, and refused to receive the false prince. The artist has grafted on this insignificant episode a crowd of accessory incidents, the profusion of which astounds the spectator. While St. Benedict, with an imperative gesture, dismisses Totila’s envoy and his escort, who stand on the steps of a staircase leading to the abbey, other visitors are received by monks standing at the head of another staircase. The lower part is filled with

led horses, and serving-men who press round, by maniacs, and by sick persons who drag themselves along or are carried in litters, while Christ, surrounded by the Virgin and saints, appears in the sky. It is in fact a tumultuous crowd, to which the execution, highly finished in some places, very rough in others, lends animation. But if Rubens neglected to control the general arrangement of this somewhat improvised picture, if it contains figures already employed in former works, we hardly think of uttering these criticisms, so much are we delighted by the masterly, vigorous touch, and above all, by the charm of the brilliant harmony that none but the master could have achieved. With the marvellous certainty of his instinct and experience, when taking into account the needs of the picture, he distributed the values, brought together harmonious tones, sounded here and there louder and more joyful notes: such as the banners that float in the wind, a shining breastplate, the white crupper of a horse, the yellow or scarlet of a robe, brought into relief, as usual, by the neutral tints of the architecture, and the grey blues of a clouded sky. More at his ease within the moderate dimensions of this canvas (5 ft. 1·81 in. by 7 ft. 9·70 in.), the artist abandoned himself entirely to the pleasure of painting with the enthusiasm of an inimitable virtuosity, always kept within bounds by a well-balanced mind. With every appearance of impetuosity, he remained master of himself. He was undoubtedly fond of this picture, for, in spite of the many opportunities of disposing of it, it remained in his studio until his death; perhaps he knew that he should only lessen its impressiveness if he attempted to finish it. Delacroix made a beautiful copy of it, clearer and more brilliant than the original; and the King of the Belgians conceived the happy notion of buying the copy, and placing it beside the original picture in his gallery.

About 1625, Rubens painted a picture of similar dimensions (6 ft. 3·98 in. by 4 ft. 7·11 in.) for the altar of the Chapel of St. Anne in the Church of the Barefooted Carmelites, the *Education of the Virgin*; its extreme simplicity contrasts with the animation of the *St. Benedict*. The tender intimacy of the subject, and the charm he was able to give it, afford a fresh proof of the versatility of his genius. Save for the blackish green, and the rather dark red of St. Anne's robe, there are

only light, transparent, delicately shaded tones throughout. The subdued blue of the Virgin's robe, the still more subdued blue of the sky which repeats it, form a delightful accompaniment to the fresh carnations of the two angels who hold a crown above the young girl's head. Everything smiles in the silvery light, everything breathes of innocence, of a calm and happy life; this representation of domestic happiness exhales a perfume as pure as that of the wild roses which brighten the left of the picture.

Subjects dealing with the life of the Virgin enjoyed a great vogue at that time. By a natural impulse that the action of the clergy helped to stimulate, religion had become gentler and more tender in Flanders, as if her children felt the need of sweeter and more consoling impressions after the wars and persecutions which had stained the country with blood. Episodes inspired by the dramatic scenes of the *Passion*, in which the mother of Christ was represented overwhelmed with grief at the foot of the cross, or holding her Son's corpse in her lap, were still frequent; but oratories and churches were more and more adorned with canvases on which were depicted the joys of her maternity, or the triumphant apotheosis of her *Assumption*. Rubens, with his great decorative qualities, was better able than any one else to give such subjects the brilliance and magnificence they required; and he could also count on numerous patrons among the high dignitaries of the Church. He was commissioned by one of them in 1624 to paint the large picture of the *Adoration of the Magi* (now in the Antwerp Museum) for the high altar of the Abbey Church of St. Michael, where Rubens's mother was buried, for a sum of fifteen hundred florins. The Abbot Yrsselius, who was elected prior in 1613, soon made the master's acquaintance. Rubens painted the superb portrait of him which hangs in the Copenhagen Museum, where he is represented in the white costume of the Order of Premonstrants. The figure of Yrsselius, a personage with delicate and energetic features, and a complexion still ruddy in spite of his great age,<sup>1</sup> stands out boldly against a red curtain, on which are displayed his arms and motto, *Omnibus Omnia*. Overwhelmed with work as Rubens was, to please Yrsselius, he painted the

<sup>1</sup> Yrsselius died soon afterwards, in 1629, at the age of eighty-eight.

*Adoration of the Magi* entirely with his own hand, and finished it, it is said, in thirteen days. Although we know not what foundation there may be for the tradition, we must confess that it seems justified by the expeditious lightness and accuracy of the execution. As Fromentin says, "The picture displays a solidity, a breadth, a certainty, and an assurance that the painter seldom surpassed in his quieter works. It is certainly a wonderful feat, if we consider the rapidity of the work of this extemporiser . . . . It may be cited as one of the most beautiful among Rubens's purely picturesque compositions, the most perfect expression of his knowledge as a colourist, of his practical dexterity, when his vision was clear and instantaneous, his hand rapid and careful, and he himself not too difficult to please; the triumph of enthusiasm and knowledge, in short, of confidence in himself." In transcribing these eulogies it seems to us just to add that if ever the marvellous facility of Rubens revealed itself in a legitimate manner, it was in this work. With the authority of acquired talent and the experience derived from treating the subject several times before, he combined the advantage of studies specially made for the work; for example, the head of the bull, indicated in so masterly a manner in the foreground, the camels, so lifelike in character, so accurate in silhouette, and again, the Nubian slaves grouped by their side; then finally the African king parading in the centre of the picture, who darts his "strangely burning" glances at the Virgin. For this figure Rubens utilised a study made shortly before<sup>1</sup> from some Antwerp merchant, who, trading doubtless with the Levant, dressed himself up in an Eastern costume and turban. The study is dashed off with surprising animation, and proves Rubens's power of assimilating reality with his particular point of view, while profiting by his observation of nature. Rubens kept the same pose in the picture as in the study, but he modified the type to suit the subject, and, instead of the light violet tunic worn by the model, he gave the king one of a deeper and more brilliant tone, which was, he felt, necessary here. Nothing could be better suited to the general balance of the composition than the strong colour of the Oriental's greenish blue coat; the tone makes the reds, scattered through the picture, vibrate, and forms,

<sup>1</sup> It is now in the Cassel Museum.



ST. ROCH HEALING THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN.

(Facsimile of the engraving by Pontius after Rubens's picture in the Cathedral at Alost.

as it were, the nucleus or dominant point of the whole scheme of colour.

Many other merits recommend this picture, in which the artist displays the inexhaustible wealth of his combinations for our admiration. What lessons for any one who handles a brush may be learned from his method of working up the colours, and enlivening them by reflected lights, without altering their nature or depriving them of their bloom! What variety is seen in the contrasts or blending of the tints! What ingenuity is displayed in the choice of the minor decorations, such as the gold embroideries, or lace, the stripes or facings used to raise or subdue a tone, or to link it to a neighbouring tint! What an intelligent method, and what freedom of touch is revealed in every stroke! With what skill and dexterity the master makes use of the bistre of the prepared ground: by means of a few loaded high lights, he indicates ears of corn, or an animal's hide, or the fur of a garment, or the thickness or suppleness of a drapery! What divination, indeed, what a clear vision of Eastern harmonies, is shown in the sun-lit columns, and the nude figures of the camel-drivers standing out against a blue sky flecked with white clouds! But what enhances all this beauty of detail, and constitutes a new departure in Rubens's work, is the general effect of the picture, in which, as M. Max Rooses justly observes, he inaugurated the blonde luminous manner that remained his own thenceforward to the end. We have already seen it in his pictures occasionally in isolated passages. But here we have it firmly established, well thought out, and complete: it constitutes his definitive doctrine. He never again lapsed into opaque tones, or harsh transitions in colours or values. We find, on the contrary, a deep and rich transparency even in the strongest shadows. He obtained bolder effects by more moderate means; by thus giving more life and vivacity to his compositions, he gave them more unity. His method is now fixed; unhesitatingly and with joyous enthusiasm, he approached nearer and nearer to brightness and light, and the generous expansion of his instincts and experience will be the true characteristic of his best works. But it is only to be found, in all its fulness, in those which he conceived and carried out alone. To appreciate how greatly the co-operation of his pupils lowered the



XXVI

*Adoration of the Magi.*

(ANTWERP MUSEUM.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)





Cliché Braun, Clément et C<sup>ie</sup>

Printed by Chassepot Paris (France)

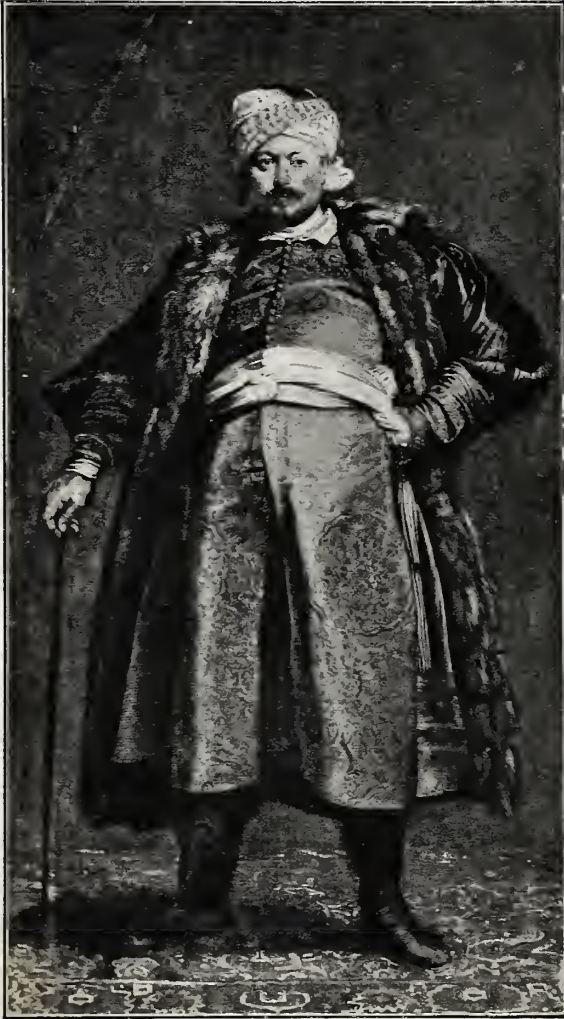


value of his work, we have only to compare this *Adoration of the Magi* in the Antwerp Museum with the picture now in the Louvre, which was commissioned from Rubens three years after by the widow of Pecquius, the Chancellor of Brabant, for the church of the Sisters of the Annunciation, where the Chancellor was buried.<sup>1</sup> The picture is valuable both for its freedom of composition and its imposing decorative effect; but it possesses neither the same coherence, nor the same inspiration, and the work of pupils is betrayed here and there by a certain frigid and constrained execution.

It is, however, for other reasons, that the *Assumption of the Virgin*, which still hangs above the high altar of Antwerp Cathedral, for which it was painted, lacks the masterly effect of the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Museum, though it has more brilliance, and is entirely by the hand of Rubens. After it was begun, the picture suffered from various interruptions, caused, as M. Max Rooses points out, by no fault of the artist. The first negotiations relating to the commission for the *Assumption* took place at the beginning of 1618. They did not come to an end until much later, on account of the alterations made in the choir of Notre Dame, for the burial of the Canon del Rio, dean of the chapter of that church. In order that he might judge of the effect that the picture would produce when hung in its place, and might finish the work without hindrance, divine service was suspended in the choir at Rubens's request after May 15, 1626. A great sorrow compelled him to prolong the authorisation that had been granted him until the 30th September following. It will be easily understood that the execution of the picture (for which Rubens received 1,500 florins) suffered by these successive delays. As in the *St. Roch* of Alost, the *Conversion of St. Bavon*, and the *Miracle of St. Benedict*, the *Assumption* is divided in the middle into two distinct episodes: below, the Apostles surround the Virgin's empty grave; above, she rises to heaven in the midst of angels. But the arrangement was to some extent dictated by the subject; and Rubens, in adopting it, was inspired by Titian's celebrated

<sup>1</sup> The Louvre picture was sold to the King of France in 1777 by the nuns of the convent, in spite of the formal opposition of the Privy Council of Brabant, which acted on this occasion as protector of the Pecquius family.

*Assumption.* As in the work of his famous predecessor, the Virgin lacks simplicity and distinction, and her pink and blue draperies are, at a distance, confused with the angels who hover around. These present a somewhat confused silhouette, and a leg of one of



AN ORIENTAL. (Study for the "Adoration of the Magi" at Antwerp.)  
(Cassel Museum.)

them looks like the continuation of one of St. John's arms. It is also to be regretted that, in order, doubtless, to give good measure to the chapter, which had allowed him forty-five florins for an ounce of ultramarine, Rubens painted the garment of the Apostle stooping over the tomb of much too bright a blue. But, save for this slight flaw, the lower part is superb in style and harmony. St. John's pose and countenance indicate his grief at the separation from his adopted mother, and his deep regret that he cannot follow her. Near him the figures in the middle distance, bathed in warm transparent shadow, stand out delicately against the

background; while in the centre, in the full light, one of the female saints, with the features of Isabella Brant, pensive and charming, graceful and serene, points to the shroud the triumphant Virgin has just abandoned.

When Rubens painted his beloved wife in this place of honour, he perhaps wished to associate the memory of one who was already no

more with this radiant figure. Isabella died on June 20th, 1626. In her the great artist lost the beloved companion who had endowed his home with joy and dignity. His domestic life had been one of unbroken happiness. He loved to rest from the ever-increasing labours and obligations of his public life in the society of his wife and family. During his diplomatic missions, and the frequent periods of absence which they necessitated, he felt sure that his children would be properly educated, for he could rely on Isabella's tender solicitude for them. The loss of his eldest child, his daughter Clara Serena, who died on the 21st March, 1623, had been his first grief. We have no information about her; and the inventory,<sup>1</sup> drawn up on the 31st August, 1639, after the death of Jan Brant, her maternal grandfather, only tells us that among other works by his son-in-law, Brant possessed a portrait of the girl. The portrait, now lost, would probably have helped us to find her face in other paintings, where the master doubtless introduced it, as he did those of most persons of his near acquaintance.



ALBERT AND NICHOLAS RUBENS.  
(Liechtenstein Gallery.)

<sup>1</sup> This inventory, together with that made after the death of Isabella Brant, was published by M. Max Rooses in the *Bulletin Rubens*. Both are in the archives of the Castle of Gaesbeck, the property of the Marchesa Biconati-Visconti, a descendant of Albert Rubens.

In Prince Liechtenstein's gallery, however, there is a superb portrait of his two sons. A replica in the Dresden Gallery long passed as the original. But taking into account its yellowish colour, the timidity of the execution, and the weakness of the drawing, particularly in the hands, this picture is now considered to be a copy apparently made during the painter's lifetime and in his studio. In addition to its superior merit, a certain detail confirms the authenticity of Prince Liechtenstein's picture. An examination of the panel on which it is painted reveals the fact that it originally contained only the busts of the boys, and that, while the work was in progress, Rubens decided to enlarge it, and paint them at full length. Albert, the elder of the two, is dressed in a black costume slashed with white ; he holds a book under his right arm and embraces his brother with the other. Nicholas is dressed in brighter material—grey breeches, a blue slashed jacket with yellow satin puffs and ribbons—and plays with a captive goldfinch. The brilliance and harmony of the colour, and the happy arrangement of the group, bear sufficient testimony to the pleasure Rubens took in painting the picture about the year 1626, to judge from the age of his young models. The children were already well-grown and handsome ; the happiness of their home-life seemed assured, when suddenly Isabella was taken seriously ill. Her condition soon gave cause for anxiety, for although we find in Rubens's correspondence no reference to his wife's health, the inventory made after her death mentions not only a sum of sixty-one florins paid to various religious communities for prayers for her recovery, but also the fees paid to four doctors called in in consultation. Prayers and medical aid alike proved useless ; Isabella was taken from her affectionate family, and buried in the abbey of St. Michael, by the side of Rubens's mother.

From the inventory drawn up in legal form by the notaries, F. Herche and T. Guyot, we may borrow a few details concerning the honours paid to the deceased. The funeral arrangements were in accordance with Rubens's wealth, and his position at Antwerp. Among the expenses incurred are the fees of the surgeon who conducted the autopsy, generous alms for the poor, gratuities to the family servants and to those of the Guild of St. Luke and of the Society of the Romanists, the painting of thirty-five escutcheons with the family

arms, and a sum paid to the choristers who took part in the ceremony. According to custom, funeral banquets were prepared for the associates of the Chamber of Rhetoric, the *Gilliflower*, for the members of the Antwerp magistracy, and for intimate friends; and finally, a sum was devoted to the foundation of an annual mass at the Carmelite convent. The division of the property between Rubens and his two sons had been agreed upon with the children's guardians, Jan and Hendrick Brant, their maternal grandfather and great-uncle. Isabella's possessions were to be divided equally between "Master P. P. Rubens' gentleman, of her Highness's household, and his children, without separation or reservation on either side; the aforesaid P. P. Rubens shall not reserve to himself any jointure, whether stipulated or customary; but he shall have absolute possession of all her clothes, of linen, wool, or otherwise; item, her personal jewels and ornaments, also her saddle-horse with its harness, her arms and her rings, excepting those which are in the glass cases (near the agates), the contents of which have been noted in the inventory."

As assets in the estate there were, besides the house on the Wapper, seven other houses in Antwerp, three of which adjoined the first; properties in the country, and, among others, the estate, *het hoff van Urssele*, at Eechern; sums due for pictures; capital guaranteed by mortgages on property belonging to private persons, or on loans contracted by towns. In the list of expenses incurred by Rubens, up to August 28, 1628—the date of the drawing up of the inventory—we find accounts from his frame-maker, from his panel-maker, accounts of the balance of payments made to artists, his pupils Cornelius Schut and Justus van Egmont, or to others, such as Martin Ryckaert, the landscape-painter, and Paul de Vos, the animal and still-life painter. The former received 250 florins and the latter 310, probably the price of their collaboration. Different sums due to engravers (900 florins to Nic. Rickemans, and 300 to Paul Dupont (Pontius), for work executed by them), and the sum of 64 florins for a purchase of paper delivered to the printer prove that Rubens himself undertook the sale of some of the engravings made after his works.

The family property, already considerable at the time of Isabella's death, was shortly afterwards very greatly increased by the sale of

horror of the subject, than by the beautiful features of the lovely, countenance." The livid pallor, terrified expression, and noble features, of the *Medusa's Head*, now in the Vienna Gallery, fully justify Huygens's admiration.

Another important canvas by Rubens originally included in the sale, *The Holy Spirits ascending into Heaven*, could not be finished in time, and the sum of 6000 florins, at which it was valued, was deducted from the total. To make up for this, a selection of prints engraved by Vorsterman, P. Pontius, and other artists, after the master's pictures, was purchased by Buckingham for 1,500 florins. Before parting with his collection, Rubens reserved to himself the right to make himself, or to have made, copies of certain pictures, casts of statues, and impressions of medals and engraved stones, of which he wished to keep some remembrance. Owing to the renewal of hostilities between Spain and England and the unsafe conditions for transport, the forwarding of all the things occasioned difficulties and delays to which references are made in the correspondence between Gerbier and Rubens. It is scarcely necessary to add that Rubens, while recognising Buckingham's courtesy and generosity towards himself, preserved his entire independence in the negotiations then in progress in view of a reconciliation between the two nations. He rightly appreciated the regal tastes of the great noble, but he was severe in his condemnation of the statesman whose vanity and adventurous policy proved so disastrous to his country.

Besides the formal indications of the life and character of Rubens furnished by the inventory made after the death of Isabella, we have the master's own testimony as to what the wife he had just lost had been to him. The letter he wrote from Antwerp, on the 15th of July, 1626, to his friend Dupuy, in reply to condolences the latter had addressed to him, is so instructive and so pathetic that we shall quote it almost in full. "Your lordship is right to remind me that I must submit to the destiny that yields not to our inclinations and passions; for it obeys the Supreme Power, and does not account to us for, nor reason with us about its actions. As an absolute ruler, it disposes all things, and since we must needs obey it like slaves, we can only try, by submission, to make our dependence as honourable and





...the ... ..

...the ... ..

*Study for the "Conversion of St. Paul."*

(THE LOUVRE)

...the ... ..

...the ... ..





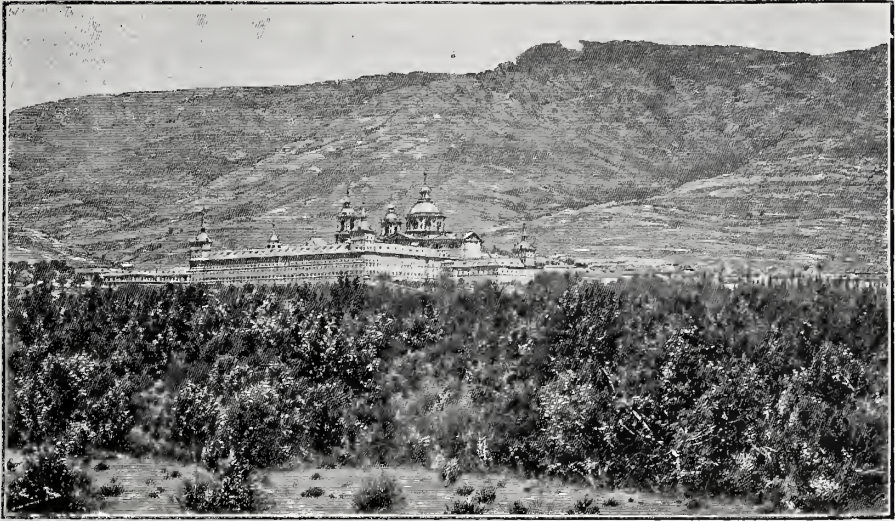
endurable as possible. But this duty seems to me just at present very trying and difficult. It is, then, with great wisdom that your lordship exhorts me to rely on time, which will do for me what my reason ought to do, for I have no pretensions of ever attaining an impassive stoicism. In my opinion, no man can be wholly unmoved by the different impressions that events produce in him, or preserve an equal indifference towards all worldly matters. I believe, on the contrary, that it is right on certain occasions to blame such indifference rather than to praise it, and that the feelings which rise spontaneously in our hearts, should not be condemned. In truth I have lost an excellent companion, and one worthy of all affection, for she had none of the faults of her sex. Never displaying bitterness or weakness, her kindness and loyalty were perfect ; and her rare qualities, having made her beloved during her life, have caused her to be regretted by all after her death. Such a loss, it seems to me, ought to be deeply felt, and since the only remedy for all evils is the oblivion that time brings, I must undoubtedly look to time for consolation. But it will be very difficult for me to separate the grief caused by this bereavement, from the memory of one whom I must respect and honour as long as I live. A journey might perhaps serve to take me away from the sight of the many objects which necessarily renew my grief, for she alone still fills my henceforth empty house, she alone lies by my side on my desolate couch ; whereas the new sights that a journey affords occupy the imagination and furnish no material for the regrets that are for ever springing up in one's heart. But I should travel in vain, for I shall have myself for companion everywhere."

With its perfect truth and simplicity, the sincere emotion of this letter shows us well enough the void that Isabella's death had made in Rubens's home. Work alone could take him out of himself, and give him some distraction in his grief. Compelled to keep his engagements with the clergy of Notre-Dame, he was obliged, almost at once, to overcome his trouble and finish the *Assumption* for the high altar of that church. Doubtless his friends, who felt how salutary such a task would be to him, and the members of the chapter, who were desirous to have the choir of the cathedral again available for divine service, were equally urgent. The artist yielded to their requests ;

and by the end of September, 1626, the picture was finished. It is brilliant and quite worthy of him, but it bears traces of effort. He would have needed an easier mind than he then had, to undertake other works. Exacting as he was towards himself, he was not able to recover the moral balance and the self-control that the even tenour of his life had hitherto assured him. This period of his career was marked by a relatively restricted production, compared with the exuberance of happier years. From 1626 to 1628, except a few portraits and some frontispieces designed for the Plantin Press, he produced nothing of importance. Yet he could less than ever afford to be idle. His mind was disturbed, his powers of endurance almost at an end. To escape from himself, he plunged into politics; they occupied nearly all his time, and the busy life that they entailed gave him the illusion of activity. He now brought the full measure of the intelligence and marvellous abilities of which he had given evidence in his art to bear on the new kind of employment imposed on him by the confidence of the Infanta Isabella and her minister Spinola.



THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN.  
(Albertina Collection.)



GENERAL VIEW OF THE ESCORIAL.  
Drawing by Boudier. (From a photograph.)

## CHAPTER IV

THE INFANTA ISABELLA ORDERS RUBENS TO RESUME THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE WITH ENGLAND—JOURNEY TO HOLLAND—PORTRAITS AND TAPESTRY CARTOONS—CORRESPONDENCE WITH PEIRESC AND P. DUPUY—DEPARTURE FOR SPAIN—RUBENS GAINS THE FAVOUR OF PHILIP IV.—PORTRAITS PAINTED IN SPAIN—COPIES FROM TITIAN—RELATIONS WITH VELAZQUEZ—MISSION TO ENGLAND.



STUDY OF A CHILD.  
(The Hermitage.)

THE position of affairs between England and Spain had scarcely changed since the negotiations that had been carried on in Paris at Buckingham's initiative and with the Infanta Isabella's consent between Gerbier and Rubens. Europe presented the appearance of a large camp always under arms, and hostilities between the different nations only ceased when the belligerents were exhausted, or the severities of the winter season rendered fighting impossible.

The rupture with England and the renewal of hostilities with the Dutch placed Spain in a very critical position. The governor of Flanders greatly desired to secure England's friendship. Charles I. seemed well

disposed towards the alliance ; and Buckingham, whose great influence over the king enabled him to direct his policy, did his best to bring it about. Gerbier, who enjoyed the favourite's confidence, was chosen to broach the matter to Rubens, whose credit with Isabella was well known. They were both painters, and intelligent and prudent men : as unofficial diplomatists they knew they had no power to pledge their employers to any course of action, and that their unrecognised position exposed their proceedings to a disclaimer should their acts be compromising or inopportune. But their interests being identical, they quickly became friends, and continued to correspond after their separation.

Once started on such a career, Rubens was anxious to play an honourable part ; he was not a man to resign himself to the rôle of a supernumerary. Besides a very natural desire to improve his own position, he had the nobler ambition of connecting his name with negotiations which, after so much bloodshed and ruin, were to bring about an honourable peace between two great nations. Rubens was a lover of peace. He wrote to Gerbier : " War is a chastisement from heaven, and we ought to do our best to avoid the scourge." In other letters Rubens enlarged upon the subject, hoping " to see that most excellent masterpiece, peace," and to find once more the happy days " of the golden age, if only the business should terminate as is wished for the good of Christendom."

It was difficult to carry on the negotiations at a distance, for fresh complications altered the situation<sup>1</sup> at every turn ; a meeting was therefore necessary in order to come to an agreement on essential points. Gerbier, provided with a passport, went to Brussels about the end of February, 1627. He carried with him a letter of credit from the Duke of Buckingham to Rubens, and a proposal from the duke to ensure the cessation of hostilities by means of a treaty between Spain, England, Denmark, and the States-General of the United Provinces, for a term of from two to seven years, during which a

<sup>1</sup> M. Gachard's excellent essay, *Histoire politique et diplomatique de Rubens* (Brussels, 1877), should be consulted for details of the negotiations in which Rubens took part.



definitive peace should be arranged. Rubens replied on the part of the Infanta that it would be simpler and therefore preferable, for the King of England to treat only with the King of Spain, and to leave the others out of the affair; Gerbier accordingly returned to London to submit the proposal to his master. The duke agreed to the proposition, on condition that the United Provinces should be included in the arrangement, because of the old alliance between them and Great Britain. But the King of England undertook to do all in his power to ensure that the conditions asked by the Dutch should be favourable.

The Infanta transmitted these overtures (April 17, 1627) to Philip IV.; while he approved his aunt's favourable reply, he was as a matter of fact greatly embarrassed. The Duke d'Olivarès and the French ambassador had signed a treaty of alliance at Madrid on March 20, in which France and Spain pledged themselves to make common war on England, and in the event of their success to divide the country between them, and to restore the Catholic religion. However, Philip IV., with the duplicity then customary, instructed the Infanta to proceed with the negotiations with Buckingham, but to seek to gain time, and to settle nothing definitely. In order to meet the just complaints of the French Court, should it become cognisant of the power entrusted to Isabella, the authorisation was antedated by fifteen months. In the despatch of June 15, 1627, accompanying it, the king haughtily expressed his astonishment and displeasure that his aunt "should employ a painter in affairs of such importance. It might throw deserved discredit on the monarchy, for its prestige must suffer if ambassadors were forced to discuss such grave matters with a man of low rank. If the country whence the proposals emanate is to be free to choose the intermediary, and if England finds nothing improper in the choice of Rubens, the selection is nevertheless a matter of great regret to us." In yielding, as she was obliged, to this representation, Isabella, who greatly appreciated the ability and devotion of Rubens, judiciously replied to her nephew that "Gerbier was also a painter, and that the Duke of Buckingham, in sending him to

her, had entrusted him with a letter in his own hand, ordering him to confer with Rubens : that it was besides of little importance by whom the negotiations were commenced ; as soon as the matter was well in hand, it would of course be entrusted to better authorised persons. She would, however, obey the king's commands, and endeavour as far as she could to continue the negotiations, without coming to a definite conclusion." (July 22, 1627.)

Did Rubens know of the opposition that his intervention in this matter excited at the Spanish Court ? He seems to have had some inkling of it, for shortly before Philip IV. mentioned his dissatisfaction to the Infanta, Rubens had shown anxiety to justify the usefulness of his intervention, in order to ensure its continuance. Two months before, on May 19, 1627, he wrote secretly to Gerbier, asking him to try with great caution to influence Buckingham to state that he considered the continuance of Rubens's good offices most useful. Gerbier was not to let it be known that Rubens had written, but to let it appear as if it were the expression of the Duke's spontaneous desire. For greater safety Rubens in a postscript begged Gerbier "to burn his letter as soon as he had done with it, for it might ruin him with his masters, although it contains no harm ; it might at least destroy his credit with them, and render him useless for the future." Things being settled to his satisfaction, it was decided that as Gerbier's return to Brussels might excite suspicion, Rubens should meet him in Holland. Buckingham's agent had gone there in June at the same time as Lord Carleton, who, after having given up diplomacy for a short time, had been entrusted with several missions, first to France in 1626, and later to the United Provinces. Their intervention procured Rubens a passport ; they alleged that his presence was required in Holland in order that he might discuss with Gerbier the transfer of his collection to the Duke of Buckingham, a statement that was partly true. After various discussions as to the town in which the meeting should take place, it was arranged that it should be at Delft, Amsterdam or Utrecht.

Authorised by the Infanta, Rubens went to Breda, crossed the frontier, and reached Utrecht. In order to escape the surveillance of

which he knew he was the object, he pretended that he visited the town to see his brother-painters and their works. Painting had long flourished at Utrecht; the town remained the centre of the school of the *Italianisers*, the most celebrated of whom Rubens probably knew at Rome.<sup>7</sup> His name, which was celebrated throughout Holland, made him welcome everywhere. He visited Abraham Bloemart, Hendrick Terbruggen, and C. Poelenburg; the last he had often met at Elsheimer's, and he greatly admired his work. In order to justify



MERCURY AND ARGUS.

(Sketch for the picture in the Prado.)

the alleged purpose of his journey, and at the same time to indulge his inclinations, he bought of Poelenburg two of those pictures in which the Dutchman represented figures of nymphs or bathers amid the ruins of the Roman Campagna, with the softest and most delicate touch.<sup>1</sup> Rubens was even more attracted to Honthorst, who had been appointed dean of the Guild of St. Luke at Utrecht in 1625. Rubens had often reproduced in his compositions—notably in the *Old Woman with a Brazier*, in the Dresden Gallery—the effects of light which their mutual friend, Elsheimer, had brought into

<sup>1</sup> The two pictures are mentioned in the inventory drawn up at Rubens's death.

fashion, effects to which Rembrandt was beginning to lend the magic poetry of his brush. In order to disarm suspicion still further, Rubens asked Honthorst to go with him to the other towns of Holland to introduce him to the artists with whom he was acquainted. But Honthorst's health compelled him to refuse. Rubens had noticed in his studio a *Diogenes* painted by his pupil Sandrart; he sought an introduction to the young man to congratulate him on his success, and took him with him on a fortnight's tour through Holland. Sandrart was much delighted to be thus distinguished by so famous a man, and later recorded with evident pleasure in his *Teutsche Academie* reminiscences of the journey, in which he had unknowingly helped to conceal his illustrious companion's real purpose. He praised Rubens's charming simplicity and amenity, and stated that he undertook the journey in order to find distraction from his grief at his wife's death. In reality the great painter was joined at Delft on July 21 by Gerbier, and the Abbate Scaglia, the Duke of Savoy's envoy to England; and there, without Sandrart's knowledge, he discussed the object of his mission with them for a week. But it was easier to deceive an inexperienced youth than professional diplomatists. The arrival of Isabella's court-painter, of which they were at once informed, roused their curiosity; the Venetian ambassador, always on the watch, and the French ambassador, who was particularly interested in discovering what might be plotting against his master, had fathomed the mystery. The affair had made so much noise that Carleton was obliged to calm the Prince of Orange's excitement by giving him reassuring explanations. But the conferences went no further than vague protestations regarding the good intentions of the Spanish Court, transmitted by Rubens; Philip IV.'s formal commands prevented any actual engagement being made before the arrival of Don Diego Messia, whom he was sending from Madrid to Brussels to state his wishes.

Rubens accordingly returned to Antwerp, whence he vainly endeavoured to calm Gerbier's impatience. Gerbier could not make up his mind to go back to England "empty-handed, and desired at



XXVII

*The Garden of Love.*

(THE PRADO.)



Hieronymus Bosch

Printed by Witmann Paris (France)





least to take his master a written testimony of the good intentions of the Infanta and Spinola" (Letter of September 6, 1627); for, failing this, his credit and that of Rubens would be greatly diminished.

On Don Diego's arrival, Gerbier had to be informed that the delays were explained by the announcement made by the King of Spain's envoy of the conclusion of a treaty between Philip IV. and the King of France. Rubens was as much chagrined as his colleague; and in three letters, all dated September 18, he tried to persuade Gerbier that the Infanta, although she submitted to the commands from Madrid, did not renounce a project she had so much at heart. "We believe," he said, "that these leagues will be like thunder without a thunder-bolt, which will make a noise in the air without producing any effect." Besides, Don Diego "has disabused himself of several things since his arrival here, and he has recommended me to keep up our correspondence with vigour, saying that affairs of state are subject to many reverses, and that they easily change. As to myself," added Rubens, "this ill success is a great grief to me, and quite contrary to my good intentions; but my conscience acquits me of ever having failed to endeavour to bring everything to a good end, in all sincerity and industry, if God had not ordained otherwise."

Rubens's regret was sincere, and the notion he had formed of the interests of Spain and of his own were in agreement. He was not inclined, any more than Gerbier, to resign himself to the miscarriage of a negotiation which would, he hoped, have done him honour, and he also wished to retain the favour of Buckingham, with whom he had advantageously concluded the sale of his collections. Thus when Gerbier, finding his presence in Flanders useless, returned to his master, Rubens continued to occupy himself about the matter. It was probably after conferences with him, that Don Diego recognised the wisdom of his views, and modified his own ideas. Rubens could not have found a more influential intermediary to take the affair in hand. The King of Spain's envoy enjoyed the full confidence of Olivarès, the prime minister, then more powerful than ever; the services that Diego had already rendered to the crown had obtained him the title

of the Marquis de Leganès. His marriage with Spinola's daughter was to take place soon after his return to Madrid ; and during his visit to Brussels, his future father-in-law no doubt confirmed Leganès' growing belief in the expediency of the policy supported by Rubens, who had always acted according to Spinola's instructions. The artist had also personal reasons for cultivating Don Diego ; he was an amateur of curiosities and works of art, and his house at Madrid contained a fine collection of marquetry, clocks and watches, valuable



TRIUMPH OF THE EUCHARIST OVER IGNORANCE.

(Sketch in the Prado.)

arms, and pictures by famous painters. In the postscript to a letter to Dupuy, December 9, 1627, Rubens states that he is going to begin the portrait of Don Diego, whom he considers "one of the most accomplished connoisseurs in the world." According to Mols the portrait was formerly in the possession of the Leganès family. We do not know if it is now owned by a descendant. In all probability it was not painted entirely from life. Rubens, as was often his custom, probably used the fine, life-like sketch now in the Albertina collection for its completion. This masterly study shows Diego almost full face ; his expression is resolute, impenetrable, and slightly haughty. Statesmen

who had to count their leisure moments, could only grant the painter brief sittings ; he was obliged to work hastily, and we know that the portrait of Spinola which Rubens painted at the same time was finished in the absence of the sitter. In a letter to Dupuy, January 13, 1628, the artist told him that "the portrait was well advanced, and would soon be finished ; but as the colours took a long while to dry in winter, a picture could not be completed quickly." Now on January 3, Spinola had set out for Spain with Don Diego. They were both



TRIUMPH OF THE EUCHARIST OVER HERESY.  
(Sketch in the Prado.)

most favourably disposed towards Rubens ; they warmly supported his cause at Madrid with Philip IV. and Olivarès, and pointed out the benefit to be derived from his intelligence and loyalty.

Rubens, on his part, strove to obtain Olivarès's favour. It was probably for this reason that he had, shortly before, had the Spanish minister's portrait engraved by P. Pontius after one of his pictures. This charming little panel, wholly by Rubens, was recently in the Kums collection at Antwerp<sup>1</sup> and recalls the *Portrait of*

<sup>1</sup> The sale of the Kums collection took place in May, 1898.

*Longueval* in the Hermitage, painted a few years earlier under similar conditions, for an engraving by Vorsterman. It is an extremely clever *grisaille*; symbolical accessories grouped round a central medallion celebrate the Spanish minister's fame, and are handled with the most minute care. The portrait in the medallion is a head, hastily brushed in, that has no resemblance to Olivarès. The inscription on Pontius's engraving runs: *Ex archetypo Velazquez, P. P. Rubenius ornavit et dedicavit*; the words indicate that the head was replaced by the reproduction of a portrait painted and drawn by Velazquez as a model for the engraver,<sup>1</sup> and it was probably with a view to the transmission of the portrait that the two artists, as we learn from Pacheco, entered into correspondence. Gevaert composed flattering verses for the scroll at the bottom of Pontius's plate, in which the poet praised the knowledge and virtue of Olivarès; thus everything points to Rubens's desire to make himself agreeable to the man with whom he was soon to come into contact.

Notwithstanding the active part he was now taking in politics, Rubens continued to devote every moment he could spare from them to his art. He painted at this period an important series of cartoons for tapestries which the Infanta Isabella desired to present to the convent of the *Barefooted Royal Ladies* at Madrid. After the death of her husband, she was affiliated to the Order of St. Clare, and wore the costume to the end of her life; the princess professed a great devotion to the Holy Sacrament, and doubtless herself suggested to the painter as a subject for the cartoons, the glorification of the dogma of the Eucharist. We learn from two notes in a manuscript in the Chifflet collection in the Besançon library,<sup>2</sup> that in 1628 Rubens received from the Infanta, independently of the 30,000 florins paid for

<sup>1</sup> The Kums panel is not dated, but it was certainly painted before Rubens's departure for Spain, otherwise he could have painted the head himself at Madrid from life, instead of having recourse to his colleague. A copy of Pontius's engraving by Merian forms the frontispiece to an edition of Petronius dedicated to Olivarès, and published at Frankfort in 1629.

<sup>2</sup> V. Aug. Castan: *Les Origines et la Date du Saint Ildefonse de Rubens*. Besançon, 1884.



*Heads of Children.*

(BERLIN PRINT ROOM.)



Printed by Draeger, Paris.





“the patterns,” a gift of several pearls; the sketches must therefore have been finished at that date. The tapestries, which were valued at 100,000 florins, were manufactured at Brussels in the well-known workshop of Jan Raes, and sent to Madrid in 1633 to the Convent of the *Royal Ladies*, where the series of 14 pieces is still intact: I. *The Triumph of the Eucharist over Idolatry*. II. *The Triumph of the Eucharist over Philosophy and Science*. III. *The Triumph of the Eucharist over Ignorance*. IV. *The Triumph of the Eucharist over Heresy*. V. *Divine Love Triumphant in the Dogma of the Eucharist*. VI. *Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek*. VII. *The Israelites gathering Manna*. VIII. *The Sacrifice of the Ancient Law*. IX. *Elijah in the Desert*. X. *The Four Evangelists*. XI. *The Fathers of the Church and the holy Defenders of the Dogma of the Eucharist*. XII. *The Dogma of the Eucharist confirmed by the Popes*. XIII. *The Princes of the House of Austria*. XIV. *Angels glorifying the Eucharist*. Thus all the subjects tend to the glorification of the Eucharist, and, according to received tradition, the Old Testament episodes included in the series were regarded as figurative symbols of the doctrine of the new law. Some of the large canvases which served as models for the tapestries<sup>1</sup> were sent to Spain at the request of Philip IV. in 1648. Those which remained in Belgium have disappeared; they were probably burnt in the fire at the palace on February 4, 1731. The others, which were originally placed in the Carmelite church at Loeches, near Madrid, remained there till the beginning of the present century. Two of them, *The Triumph of the Eucharist over Philosophy* and *Elijah in the Desert*, were removed by the French in 1808, and were bought later for the Louvre from Marshal Sebastiani. Four (Nos. VI., VII., X., and XI.) were purchased by Mr. Bourke, the English minister to Denmark, transferred by him to the Duke of Westminster in 1816, and are still at Grosvenor House. Judging by the two at

<sup>1</sup> Several sets of these tapestries were executed later in other workshops, particularly in that of Frans van den Hecke, and separate pieces of the series are now in the possession of Baron Erlanger, and MM. Braguenié, Ferrié, and Vayson.

the Louvre, the canvases, facile but somewhat coarse in handling, are largely the work of Rubens's pupils; they testify to a remarkable decorative sense, but the absolute lack of style in some of the figures is displeasing. Many of the small sketches for the cartoons, now in the Prado, are wholly by the master's hand; he finished them most carefully, so as to leave as little latitude as possible to the interpreters entrusted with their enlargement. In the general arrangement, and even in some of the details, in the position of the scrolls, for instance, the pictures recall some of the sketches for the Henry IV. gallery, on which Rubens was then working. The likeness between the *Triumph of Henry IV.* in the Uffizi, and the *Triumph of the Eucharist over Ignorance*, is very striking: there is the same arrangement of the chariots, the same quivering horses escorted by similar figures. The latter composition, although it is overcrowded with figures, garlands, and all kinds of accessories, is picturesque and full of life. But the *Triumph of the Eucharist over Heresy*, and more notably the *Triumph of the Eucharist over Idolatry*, show Rubens's mastery even better. The skill of his brush is enhanced by a lyrical inspiration, and nowhere has he more fully expressed the supreme joy of the artist in realising the visions of his genius by means of striking images.

At the same time Rubens painted a large picture representing the *Virgin surrounded by Saints* for the high altar of the Church of the Augustines at Antwerp. M. Jules Guiffrey, in his careful study on Van Dyck, informs us that the commission given "to the most illustrious P. P. Rubens" in 1628, brought him 3,000 florins.<sup>1</sup> The composition, in which the figures are placed one above the other, is reminiscent of analogous pictures of the Venetian school that Rubens had seen in Italy, notably of the *Virgin and Child*, one of Paolo Veronese's masterpieces in the Accademia at Venice. But Rubens, in his desire to group round the Virgin's throne all the patrons of the

<sup>1</sup> Van Dyck received at the same time the commission for the *Ecstasy of St. Augustine*, in the same church, for which he was paid 600 florins. J. Guiffrey, *Antoine van Dyck*, Paris, 1882, p. 94.

brotherhoods connected with the church, put in too many figures; the silhouette, ascending too regularly on the right, is confused and slightly incoherent on the left. The defect is very noticeable in any photograph of the picture, but disappears almost entirely when we look at the original work. Rubens's consummate experience often enabled him to correct the want of balance resulting from the defective arrangement of the lines of a composition, by an intelligent distribution of the colour. The large canvas of the high altar of the Augustines has suffered at the hands of a restorer who has spoiled its brilliance, but it still preserves some trace of the richness of colour which caused Sir Joshua Reynolds, during an artistic pilgrimage in Flanders at the end of last century, to say, "I was so struck by the magnificent colouring of the picture that I did not think I had ever before seen a similar power displayed in the arts." It is



PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL.

(Baron Edmond de Rothschild's Collection.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)

difficult in its present faded condition to rightly appreciate the original aspect of the painting, but M. Max Rooses is quite justified "in recognising in it the collaboration of a pupil." A charming sketch in the Städel Institute at Frankfort absolutely confirms the learned critic's opinion; for on it is written in Flemish, and in Rubens's hand, notes of the colours, and even of the numbers of the divisions into squares, to guide his collaborators in enlarging it.

These works and the negotiations entrusted to him by the Infanta would have been sufficient to fill the days of a less energetic man than Rubens. Yet he found time to carry on a regular correspondence with his friends in France. Besides the pleasure to be derived from such exchange of thoughts, he had a direct interest in learning the situation of things in France through persons in an excellent position for informing him. He did not tell them that he was personally involved in the negotiations with England, but he liked to freely discuss the general condition of Europe, and the circumstances that might change it. His foresight and good sense often permitted him to predict the consequences of the errors he saw committed. Ignorant of the subtleties of politics, he was not liable to the divagations of professional diplomatists. He looked at things, as it were, from a distance, and sought to distinguish what was essential; he was not, therefore, distracted by the trifling incidents and the intrigues which led them astray. These habits of reflection and impartiality made his judgment lucid, and enabled him easily to find concise expression for his thought in his letters. Peiresc and his brother Valavès had left Paris, and in their absence Rubens corresponded with their friend Pierre Dupuy as regularly as circumstances permitted. He wished to obtain a copy of all the official acts published in France, but at his own expense, for he had no intention of putting the burden on Dupuy. He would be glad on his part to get the same for his correspondent, but similar collections of news did not exist in Flanders. "Here," he wrote, "everybody gets his information as best he can, although fablemongers and cheats are not lacking, who print articles unworthy the attention of a sensible man." He would, however, do his best to keep Dupuy informed, "not of trifles, but of important matters, *summa sequar vestigia rerum.*"<sup>1</sup>

The correspondence, without descending to trifling details, treats of most varied subjects, and gives an excellent idea of Rubens's extraordinary energy, and of his ever eager desire for knowledge. Politics, and the different incidents of the wars then being carried on by nearly all the nations of Europe, fill a large place in it. We hear

<sup>1</sup> Letter of September 17, 1626.

of the digging of the canal of the *Fossa Mariana* by the Spaniards ; of the operations at the Siege of La Rochelle, where Richelieu behaved so bravely, for Rubens had been told that he wore a cuirass under his robes, and that a soldier accompanied him everywhere with a helmet, lance, and shield ; of the repulse of the English expedition against the Isle of Rhé, in which " Buckingham learnt that the profession of soldier has nothing to do with that of courtier." Rubens augurs no good from the struggle undertaken by the Duke of Mantua ; but he takes the greatest interest in the information transmitted to him concerning it, because " he was for more than six years in the service of the Gonzaga family, and gratefully remembered the treatment he had received from them." But the situation and the bad condition of the fortress of Casale would not allow of a long resistance, and besides, the exactions rendered necessary by the extravagant expenditure of Duke Vincenzo and his sons, had caused disaffection among their subjects. The artist also deploras the sale of the Mantuan collections to England ; he knew those collections well, and possessed a drawing of the famous cameo which belonged to them, and " which he had often seen and handled himself." <sup>1</sup>

Continual warfare and the armaments it made necessary, had successively ruined all the nations of Europe. Rubens thought the *Turk* very sick even at that epoch, for he was surrounded by neighbours who coveted his territory ; he considered that he was " marching swiftly to ruin, and incapable of resisting the slightest blow." His personal experiences had made him familiar with the financial embarrassments of all the sovereigns. Poverty even made itself felt at Antwerp : " The town suffers from a condition that is neither peace nor war. She has to bear all the evil consequences of the violences and disagreeables of war, without having any of the advantages of peace. The Spaniards think to weaken their enemy by taking away the trade of the town ; they have only ruined the city, which, having no longer any trade by which to support itself, grows poorer and poorer, and *jam suo succo*

<sup>1</sup> The cameo, now in the Hermitage, bears the portrait busts of Ptolemy and his first wife, Eurydice.

*venit.* The king's own vassals suffer the damage, *nec enim pereunt inimici, sed amici tantum intercidunt.* And yet Cardinal Cueva obstinately upholds his error, in order not to confess his mistake. In spite of the accumulation of misery on every side, it is scarcely probable that the general situation in Europe will improve for a long time. At every instant friends change into enemies ;” and observing



NYMPHS BEARING A CORNUCOPIA.

(The Prado.)

the course of affairs, Rubens has little faith in the duration and sincerity of alliances. He places no trust in the friendships of princes, and compares them to “fires which smoulder perniciously under the ashes.” Nearly everywhere the difficulties abroad are accompanied by dissensions and disturbances at home, especially in France, where “the Court by reason of its greatness, indeed, is exposed to serious disorder.” When he thought of the intrigues going on there, he felt happy to compare it with the Court of

Brussels, to which he was deeply attached. “Here,” he wrote, “everything follows a normal course, and each minister does his best, without aspiring to other privileges than those of the rank he fills. Thus every one grows old and dies in office, without hoping for any extraordinary favour, but without fearing to fall into disgrace with the princess, who has no excessive antipathies or preferences, and is, on the whole, well disposed towards all.” Now and again the friends tell

each other of the rumours which circulate at Paris or Brussels. Dupuy has heard some talk of the marriage of the Princess de Croi with Spinola; Rubens undeceives him, for it seems to him "very difficult to catch that old fox." In another letter he discusses the duel between Boutteville and La Chapelle, which took place in the Place Royale itself; he thinks that such a scandal deserved a severe punishment, but was astonished that the course of justice should have been so rigorous, in spite of the influence in high places which had been used in favour of the culprits.

The correspondents exchanged small presents, drawings, and books on which they gave their opinions. Rubens received in January, 1628, the two volumes of Balzac's *Letters*, and discovered in the very first pages "that love of himself (*philautia*) which so justly earned for their author the name of *Narcissus*. His style, however, has an indescribable



PORTRAIT OF THE ARCHDUKE FERDINAND IN HIS CARDINAL'S ROBES.

(Munich Gallery.)

charm, and shows the insight of a high intelligence; but the vanity with which he is intoxicated spoils these fine qualities." And, as if to impress his opinion more strongly on his friend, he added on the margin, "his spirit is disdainful, and he has the ordinary fault of rank, pride." A little later (April 27, 1628), while approving a very severe criticism of the letters<sup>1</sup> published by Father Goullu, Rubens did not

<sup>1</sup> *Douze Livres de Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste*, 1627 and 1628.

wish to see Balzac crushed ; for, in spite of his exaggerations and vanity, he could not help sometimes recognising “the salt of his jests, the animation of his polemics, the conciseness of his sentences, and the seriousness of his ethics, although such qualities are spoilt by an unpleasant seasoning of arrogance.” But archæology attracted him more than all other subjects. In a letter to Peiresc (May 19, 1628), he communicated to him some notes on the antique painting found in the gardens of the Esquiline, and known by the title of the *Nozze Aldobrandini*, at the discovery of which he had himself been present at Rome in 1606. Rubens had preserved so faithful a recollection of it that, although more than twenty years had gone by, he described it from memory.

These letters furnish valuable notes on Rubens's ways of thinking, and on his religious belief. He was throughout his life sincerely religious and observant of prescribed forms, but his strong common sense repudiated all superstitions. He could not believe in the miracles which were accepted in those troublous times by the crowd with complacent credulity. A so-called miracle had taken place in the neighbourhood of Haarlem, and had greatly stirred the feelings of the whole country. Rubens, desirous of informing Peiresc of all notable incidents, sent him an engraving representing the miracle, “but he scarcely thought the matter worthy of his attention.” Although he was naturally tolerant, and bound to a large number of ecclesiastics of different orders by ties of affection, he did not hesitate on occasion to criticise them impartially, if he thought their doctrines dangerous, or their acts reprehensible.

The artist's modesty is apparent throughout the whole of the correspondence. Not only does he never seek to bring himself into notice, but he only speaks of himself when entreated, and then with the utmost simplicity and moderation. At most a few particulars may be gathered from the letters concerning his life and his health, which was already beginning to fail. In a short letter to Dupuy on March 6, 1628, he apologised for its brevity by his inability “to handle the pen. He has just been bled in the right arm, and he feels it more than usual ; but his indisposition is not serious.”





XXVIII

*Helena Fourment.*

(MUNICH GALLERY.)



Cliche Hanfstaenßl

Printed by Wittmann Paris (France)



On August 18, 1628, Rubens informed Dupuy that their correspondence "would be interrupted for a few months, because he was about to undertake a long journey . . . but he would tell his friend of his departure, so that he might not write in vain." He referred to the journey to Spain, which was already arranged. On their arrival at Madrid, Don Diego Messia and Spinola had laid the situation before Olivarès and the king, and had insisted on the advantages of an alliance between Spain and England: the latter was now inclined to offer more favourable conditions on account of recent repulses in her struggle with France. Philip IV., desirous of learning exactly the condition of the negotiations on the matter, begged the Infanta to ask Rubens to send him all the correspondence relating to the subject, whether written in full or in cipher, that he might be in possession of all the facts before coming to a decision. Rubens replied that he alone had followed the progress and details of the negotiations, and that he was willing to give the required explanations to any one appointed, or to bring them to Madrid himself, should this be thought desirable. He evidently preferred the latter arrangement; and, without seeming to influence the King of Spain, he very diplomatically did his best to make him favourable to the plan he himself favoured. The king consulted the Junta, which thought it would be well to let Rubens come. Philip IV. assented; but doubtless, because he did not wish to attribute more importance than was necessary to "a person of low rank," he added in his own hand to the notification of the Junta, "that no pressure whatever was to be put upon Rubens, who must do whatever he considered best for his own interests."

Left free to do as he liked, Rubens did not hesitate, although he knew that the king did not regard him with any great approval. He desired to continue his part in the pending negotiations, and his own interests urged him to form relations with the chief dispenser of honours and commissions. Trusting in his star, he hoped his presence might change Philip IV.'s feelings towards him and win his favour. He took with him eight pictures for the king, painted by the Infanta's order, and

she further commissioned him to paint for her the portraits of the different members of the royal family, especially those of the king and queen, whom she had never seen. She informed her nephew on August 13, 1628, of Rubens's approaching departure, adding that he would deliver all the papers concerning the negotiations with England, and give any explanations that he judged needful. Rubens's journey, according to the instructions he received, was performed secretly, and as rapidly as possible. He wrote later to Peiresc (from Madrid, December 2, 1628) that, to his great regret, he had not been able to see any of his friends in Paris, not even the Flemish and Spanish ministers. He made a slight *détour* to La Rochelle, however, to see the operations of the siege, "which seemed to him a splendid spectacle, and he rejoiced with France and the whole of Christendom at such a glorious enterprise."

Rubens reached Madrid about September 10, and immediately began to discuss affairs with Olivarès; their frequent interviews quickly roused the curiosity of the foreign diplomatists. The papal nuncio and the Venetian ambassador hastened to transmit the suppositions to which these conferences gave rise to their respective governments. Both rightly guessed that they related to the preparation of a treaty of peace between Spain and England; but they were both equally mistaken in thinking that the negotiations had been entered into directly with Buckingham in England, and that Rubens, after a visit to London, had come at once to Madrid, merely passing through Brussels.

Unfortunately, the artist's correspondence with the Infanta has not been preserved. It would have acquainted us with the different incidents of his mission, and with the details concerning the Court of Madrid given to the Governor of Flanders, naturally desirous of such information from so clear-sighted an observer, and a man so devoted to her. Times were greatly changed since Rubens's visit to Spain twenty-four years earlier. Then he was merely a messenger in the service of the Duke of Mantua; now, although his mission was somewhat undefined, and his rôle as a diplomatist

necessarily a subordinate one, the painter was at the height of his reputation, and his personal charm and pleasing conversation soon overcame Philip IV.'s haughty prejudices. The pictures he brought for the king, however, were not of the excellence to be expected from his powers. The accounts of the General Treasury of the Low Countries for 1630 mention under the name of Rubens, a payment of 7,500 Flemish pounds, "the price of the pictures he painted by order of her Highness for his Majesty and sent to Spain;" and a note by the Infanta on the opposite page, states "that the price was arranged by Rubens before the pictures were painted, that they are now in Spain, to the king's great satisfaction, and that he ordered payment to be made at once." But, in spite of this note, we may doubt "the king's great satisfaction." Pacecho states that "the eight pictures, varying in size and subject, which Rubens



PORTRAIT OF ELISABETH DE BOURBON, FIRST WIFE OF PHILIP IV.

(Munich Gallery.)

brought for his most Catholic Majesty, were exhibited with other notable works in the new room of the Palace;"<sup>1</sup> the official inventory of 1636 certainly confirms the statement, for it contains the names of eleven pictures by Rubens hanging in the room (*salon de los Espejos*); but another inventory drawn up in 1686 shows that at that date most of the pictures had been replaced by others, and

<sup>1</sup> *Arte de la Pintura*, vol. i., p. 132.

thus it would not seem that Philip IV. valued them very highly.<sup>1</sup> Only two of the eleven pictures named in the inventory of 1636 have remained at Madrid; the others were probably burnt in the fire at the Royal Palace in 1734. The *Three Nymphs carrying a Cornucopia*<sup>2</sup>—in which the fruits, the birds, and the little monkey in the foreground, seem to be by Snyders—is much the better of the two that have been preserved. The pleasing simplicity of the composition is enriched by the brilliance of the colouring; the pretty figure of the fair-haired nymph, seated, and seen in profile, is a happy reminiscence of one of the women on the right of the composition in the *Prosperity of the Regency* in the Medici Gallery. The other picture, the *Achilles and the Daughter of Lycomedis*, it must be remembered, was not painted for Philip IV., and Rubens had only a very small share in it. In 1618, when offering the work to Sir Dudley Carleton, who refused it, the artist told him that “it was done by the best of his scholars at that time”—consequently by Van Dyck—“and only retouched by him.” Judging then from these specimens, the pictures destined for Philip IV. were not among Rubens’s masterpieces. Perhaps in choosing them he remembered the impression left by his former visit, when Philip III. and the Duke of Lerma took the copies with which Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga presented them, for originals. Since then the power of Spain and her prestige among the nations had steadily declined, but her culture of the intellect and of the arts had greatly developed. She could boast of such poets as Calderon and Lope da Vega, of such sculptors and painters as Montañes, Alonso Cano, Zurbaran, and Velazquez. Philip IV. was an intelligent connoisseur, and had studied drawing and painting under Father Maino, a Dominican. Immediately on his arrival Rubens was installed in the Palace, where a studio was arranged for him by the desire of the king, who charged Velazquez to give him every facility for access to the royal collections and the practice of his art. Rubens set to

<sup>1</sup> C. Justi, *Diego Velazquez*, vol. i., p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> The Prado, No. 1585, with the title *Ceres and Pomona*. There are numerous copies of it.



work forthwith. "Here, as everywhere," he wrote to his friend Peiresc (December 2, 1628), "I am busy painting, and I have already done an equestrian portrait of His Majesty, who has expressed his approval and satisfaction. He shows excellent taste in painting, and has, it seems to me, very remarkable qualities. I can now judge him personally, for as I live in the palace he comes to see me nearly every day. I have also painted the portraits of all the members of the royal family, who have kindly sat to me, that I might carry out the orders of my mistress, her most serene highness the Infanta."

These portraits no more deserve to be reckoned among Rubens's best works than the pictures he brought from Antwerp. The most important, the large *Equestrian Portrait of Philip IV.*, which was celebrated in the verse of Lope de Vega and F. de Zarate, has disappeared. It occurs in the inventories of 1636, 1686, and 1700, was doubtless destroyed in the fire of 1734, and is only known to us by Cosmus Mogalli's mediocre engraving. The king, clad in armour, the marshal's bâton in his hand, was painted in an open landscape, riding a brown horse. Two little angels flying in the sky held the terrestrial globe over his head, and several allegorical figures celebrated his power and his great qualities. It was a state picture, and seemed destined for a pendant to Titian's fine *Equestrian Portrait of Charles V.*, near which it was hung in the Hall of Mirrors. According to Pacheco, Rubens painted four other portraits of Philip IV. at Madrid. In one of them, now in the Durazzo palace at Genoa, the king is standing near a terrace adorned with white marble columns. The figure is imposing, and as Justi says, the manly, resolute countenance and decided expression show an authority hardly to be found in another portrait of the King in the Munich Gallery. This latter, a bust, gives the impression of a weak nature, of an easy-tempered young man who, "having shaken himself free of the constraints and surveillance to which he was subjected as prince royal, gave himself up unreservedly to all the pleasures of the intellect and of

the senses.”<sup>1</sup> There is a replica of this portrait in the Hermitage, and several copies in private collections.

In the Munich Gallery there are two other portraits of similar size painted by Rubens at this period: that of the Infant, Don Ferdinand of Spain, in his cardinal's robes, a placid, ruddy, round-faced lad with the thick lips characteristic of his race; and that of Elisabeth of Bourbon, Philip IV.'s first wife, gentle, distinguished, rather sad, and scarcely at home in the formal, stiff court, where her charm, however, made her loved by all. These three portraits, which are slightly damaged, remained in Rubens's house till his death, and figure in his inventory. Their easy, but rather soft and summary handling do not certainly explain the infatuation which Philip IV. gradually conceived for the painter, an infatuation to which his personal charm must have contributed as much as his talent.

We have seen that Rubens could converse while he painted, and his contemporaries are all agreed that he was an excellent talker. In his society the King forgot for a moment the weariness of his dull life, at once empty and busy, the hours of which were made up of long religious ceremonies, official receptions, gallantry, hunting or riding. In talking with Rubens, the most varied subjects were touched on. He had lived in Italy, and had associated with princes and sovereigns; he had just won the favour of Marie de' Medici. He was well informed concerning the general situation of Europe, he knew that of Flanders thoroughly, and strong in the absolute confidence placed in him by the Infanta, he was able, while setting forth the princess's views, to explain what seemed to him the most advantageous policy for Spain. But while he revealed his knowledge and insight, Rubens exhibited the tact and reserve that circumstances demanded. Thus the king's prejudices against him yielded to an increasing favour. It was probably to please Philip IV. that he consented to retouch the *Adoration of the Magi*, which he had painted in 1608 soon after his return from Italy for the town hall of

<sup>1</sup> C. Justi. *Diego Velazquez*, vol. i., p. 242.

Antwerp, and which, after the fall of Roderigo Calderon, to whom it had been presented, had become the property of the King of Spain. It must be confessed, however, that the picture gained nothing by the retouching. The painter's *technique* had greatly changed since the days when it was painted; then he had sought violent contrasts; now he tried to avoid them. Thus, to show exactly how great had been his progress, it would have been easier and equally expeditious to paint a new picture.

Pacheco informs us that besides these works, Rubens painted about ten portraits and two religious pictures: a life-size *St. John* for Don Jaime de Cardenas, and an important *Conception* for Don Diego Messia, who continued to treat him with great kindness. "It is hardly credible," adds Pacheco, "that Rubens could have produced so much in so short a time, and amid such numerous occupations."



PORTRAIT OF PHILIP IV.  
(Munich Gallery.)

But neither pictures nor diplomatic conferences sufficed for his energy. Far from family and friends, he made the best use of all the moments he could steal from the long periods of waiting, and the trivial amusements often imposed on him. Forced to be always within reach of the King, he fortunately discovered a profitable way of turning his leisure to account by copying the masterpieces of Titian that Charles V. and Philip II. had collected in the Palace.

Titian was his favourite master. He had admired the painter of Cadore while yet a youth at the beginning of his residence in Italy, and his admiration had increased with years. He came to understand better the full force of his genius, and while he sought instruction in making the copies, with which he never parted, he also wished perhaps to fill the gaps left in his house by the sale of his collections to the Duke of Buckingham. Besides the ten original Titians he possessed at his death, he copied, according to Pacheco, all the most notable pictures of the master then at Madrid. And as Justi points out, they were not mere sketches of small size, but copies of the size of the originals, and as faithful as Rubens's temperament allowed. While he strove to reproduce his models conscientiously, his genius impelled him, in spite of himself, to add to their breadth, animation, and brilliance. The copies, when confronted with the originals, testify to the artist's delight in painting them by the ardour and vivacity of their execution, and by their vivacious colour.

Since Rubens was always so fully occupied, he could have had little time for seeing much of the Spanish painters. One, however, found favour in his eyes, the artist whom Philip IV. had charged to show him the royal collections. Velazquez was then twenty-nine years old, and had been five years in the King's service; his favour had just been assured by the picture of the *Expulsion of the Moors*, the brilliant success of which had placed him above his rivals. Rubens foresaw his great future, although he had not yet shown the scope of his talent. He recognised in the young man charm of mind and person, combined with remarkable modesty. They both loved their art, and passionately admired the Venetian school, an additional reason for the pleasure they found in each other's society. It is pleasant to imagine them conversing in front of their favourite pictures or riding out together to the Escorial.

Towards the end of his life Rubens reminded Gerbier of the never-to-be-forgotten pleasure of that excursion, pointing to a sketch he had made at the time of the Church of St. Lawrence. As he said, "it



### *Man and Girl.*

(Drawing in Red Chalk.)

(THE LOUVRE.)

...the Louvre, he could have had little ...  
 ...the Spanish ...  
 ...the King ...  
 ...the Louvre ...  
 ...the Louvre ...

Towards the end of the ...  
 ...the Louvre ...



Printed by Draeger, Paris.





was the *extravagance of the subject*" which had attracted him rather than the beauty of "the high, steep mountain, very difficult to ascend or descend, having almost always a veil about its head, with the clouds beneath it very low, the sky above remaining clear and serene."<sup>1</sup> This desolate landscape, these *splendid horrors*, as was then the phrase in France, had no charm for Rubens; he preferred the fertile plains, fruitful meadows, and golden cornfields of Flanders. But Velazquez loved the sight of the rocky summits, the snow-covered peaks and gloomy dreariness of which he shows us in the backgrounds of his pictures. This difference in taste corresponds with the profound difference in the genius of the two masters. Rubens had been nourished on a worship of the past; he shut himself up in the King of Spain's palace and copied Titian's pictures. Velazquez only consulted Nature, who alone inspired him; he never accepted conventions or yielded to the general taste for allegory. If he shared Rubens's marked predilection for the pictures of the Venetians, it was because, as he said of Tintoretto's works, "the others seem only painting, while these are reality." But his admiration for them never led him to imitate them. Neither do we hold the general opinion that Rubens influenced the development of Velazquez's talent; we agree with Justi on this head. One point is, however, certain; that after his intercourse with Rubens Velazquez became more determined than ever to carry out his long-cherished project of visiting Italy. Rubens also nourished the hope of seeing his much loved Italy again on his way back to Flanders. The Infanta had given him permission, and going slightly out of the direct road, he intended to visit his friend Peiresc at Aix, who would be delighted to welcome him to his house, a real museum "in which all the marvels of the world were collected." What a pleasure it would have been to him to resume the interesting and unconstrained conversations on the various subjects they had at heart, especially on archæology; for he told his friend<sup>2</sup> that "perhaps on

<sup>1</sup> Letters of March 15, and April, 1640.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Peiresc from Madrid, December 2, 1628.

account of his enforced attention to his work he had not met any antiquary nor seen any medal or engraved stone in Spain ; he intended, however, to inquire into these matters, and he would inform him of the result of his researches, but he feared they would be in vain. . . .” Shortly after (December 29, 1628) he wrote Gevaert a pathetic letter ; more homesick than ever as the season approached which he was accustomed to spend at Antwerp with his children and his near relatives, he expressed to Gevaert, in the most affectionate terms, his sorrow at the separation from him and from his own family. Gevaert was a tried and faithful friend, and wishing to give him a pledge of affection, Rubens, shortly before leaving him, had painted the fine portrait which is now in the Antwerp Museum. It represents a man of a refined, distinguished appearance, with a broad forehead, pale complexion, and well formed features. The secretary of the Antwerp Municipality is seated, pen in hand, at his writing-table, on which stands a bust of Marcus Aurelius. Gevaert was at that time writing a commentary on the maxims of the Philosopher-Emperor, and he had asked Rubens to obtain information about new editions of his writings published in Spain. At the beginning of the letter, one of the few he wrote in Flemish, the artist apologised for not replying to his friend’s letter in Latin, the language in which Gevaert had written. “ He did not deserve the honour he had done him ; he had grown so rusty in all noble studies that he should be obliged to ask pardon for the solecisms he should be certain to commit. He begged Gevaert to spare his age an exercise reserved for youth, and one to which he had formerly been accustomed.” Nevertheless, he inserted in the Flemish of the letter fairly long passages in excellent Latin. He would greatly have liked to collate the texts of the different editions of the *Twelve Books of Marcus Aurelius* for his friend ; “ he heard that the celebrated library of St. Lawrence (at the Escorial) contained two manuscripts bearing that title, but according to what a man little versed in such things had told him of their appearance, he did not think they were ‘ very new, or very important, but works already widely known.’ ”

Rubens knew that he might place implicit trust in Gevaert, and he speaks very frankly of the grave political situation in Spain, where censure and complaints were showered upon the government on account of the reverses recently sustained on all sides. Before closing the letter, which the state of his health compelled him to shorten, he begged his friend to offer fervent prayers for his return. Then, in a burst of affection he commended his son, *his dear little Albert*, to him. "I love the child with all my heart, and I entreat you, the favourite of the Muses and the best of friends, to take charge of him during my lifetime, or after my death with my father-in-law and my brother-in-law." Rubens's return to Antwerp was to be still further delayed and he had also to renounce the pleasure of revisiting Italy and of going to Provence to see Peiresc.

His connection with politics obliged the great artist to subordinate all his plans to those of a court always slow of decision, the doubts of which were just now increased by the grave resolutions it had to make. Buckingham had been assassinated at Portsmouth (August 23, 1628), on the eve of his departure for La Rochelle; the King of Spain thought that his death would be likely to bring about a change in England's foreign policy. But England, exhausted by the enormous expenses of her fleet, had suffered successive and disastrous defeats in the war she was carrying on with France and Spain. It was therefore her interest to treat with one or the other; and she allowed them both to learn something of the conditions that would be proposed, before choosing the alliance which seemed the most advantageous. France and Spain on their part were equally desirous of peace. Richelieu, who was now absolute master of affairs, saw that nothing was to be gained by continuing the war with England; his great desire was to weaken the power of Austria, and he wanted all his strength to crush it. The decadence and financial distress of Spain were becoming more and more evident; it would have been a real advantage for her to secure, if not the support, at least the neutrality of England in the long and difficult struggle with the rebel Dutch. On the other

hand, the hostility between Charles I. and his parliament was increasing; the Secretary of State, Sir Francis Cottington, and the Lord Treasurer, Richard Weston, were favourable to an alliance with Spain, and the King of England saw the necessity of freeing himself from complications abroad.

The arrival at Madrid of the Abbate Scaglia, who had just been appointed envoy extraordinary from the Duke of Savoy, enabled the Spanish Court to make its decision. The diplomatist urged Olivarès to treat with England, as he had urged the ruler of Flanders to do when passing through Brussels on his return from London. Rubens, as one who had perfect knowledge of the negotiations begun by her, was asked to make a third at the conferences of the Abbate Scaglia and Olivarès. A letter from Richard Weston to Don Carlos Coloma, captain-general of the Cambrésis,<sup>1</sup> was sent by the latter to the Infanta Isabella, who informed her nephew of its contents; it came just at the right moment to break down the King's last objections. The letter declared that Charles I., in order to show his friendly inclinations, would send an ambassador to Madrid with powers to conclude the peace, if Philip IV. on his part would send a diplomatist to London with like powers. Meantime an English envoy, Endymion Porter, who accompanied the Abbate Scaglia, confirmed the English King's overtures. It was necessary to come to a speedy decision at Madrid, if they did not wish to be forestalled by France, with whom it was evident that negotiations were also being carried on. By way of reply to Porter, Olivarès determined to send Rubens to London at once with letters of credit to the Lord Treasurer and the Secretary of State, and detailed instructions as to his conduct. On April 27, 1629, Philip IV. informed his aunt by letter that he was sending Rubens to England to carry on the peace negotiations, and to obtain in the first instance a truce, according to the instructions that were given him. In passing through Brussels, Rubens would inform the Princess what those instructions were, and

<sup>1</sup> Coloma was Philip IV.'s ambassador to England in 1622, and had numerous friends there.



XXIX

*The Walk in the Garden.*

(MUNICH GALLERY.)



Printed by Witmann Paris (France)

Cliché Hanfstaengl





a second despatch from the King, dated the same day, asked her to give the artist the amount of the expenses of his return to Brussels, and a suitable sum for the fresh journey he was about to undertake. In order that the painter-diplomatist might have all the authority necessary to the accomplishment of his mission, Philip IV. desired "his good aunt, on account of Rubens's services and good qualities" to bestow on him the patent of office as secretary of his privy council, with reversion to his eldest son. And as a further testimony of his personal good-will, the King presented Rubens with a diamond ring worth two thousand ducats.

Rubens left hurriedly for Brussels on April 29, 1629. He had not time to visit his friend Peiresc on his way; in a letter to Pierre Dupuy (June 2, 1629), Peiresc mentioned his disappointment at being unable "to have charge of him for a few days, and to show him his modest treasures." Rubens reached Paris on May 10; he stayed with the Flemish Ambassador for a short time in order to inform the Baron de Vicq how things stood, and to discover what were the real wishes of the French Court. He wanted also to see the pictures of the Medici Gallery in their places, and to come to an agreement about the commission, still pending, for the paintings for the Henry IV. gallery. He visited the Abbé de St. Ambroise and other of his friends; in a letter to Peiresc (May 18, 1629), P. Dupuy mentions "the brief visit of M. Rubens to Paris, where he saw the Queen Mother's palace (the Luxembourg) and its furniture; he told me he had not seen anything so magnificent in Spain. Her bedroom—the bed is placed under a large tent—resembles the enchanted places described in the *Amadis*; only M. de Balzac, with his hyperboles, would be capable of describing it." At Brussels the artist had to inform the Infanta of the result of his mission, and of the new events that necessitated his immediate departure for England.

Rubens's absence had lasted much longer than he had foreseen; the eight months had been a barren period for his art, although he had tried his best to employ them well. But the good effect of those

months on his interests and fortune far surpassed his expectations. A very marked favour had taken the place of the not too kindly attitude which Philip IV. had at first shown towards Rubens. He returned from Madrid overwhelmed with marks of this favour, and thenceforth the King of Spain's admiration for his person and his talent was so great, that he may be said in some sort to have bought up his works in order to decorate all his palaces with them.



STUDY OF A CHILD.

(Albertina Collection.

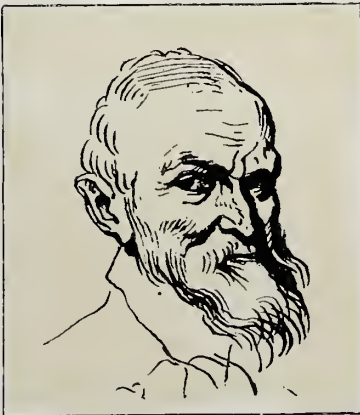
(From a photograph by Braun Clément et Cie.)



STUDY FOR A BACCHANAL.  
(M. Ch. Stein's Collection.)

## CHAPTER V

RUBENS'S DEPARTURE FOR ENGLAND (JUNE, 1629)—THE KING'S RECEPTION OF HIM—THE DIFFICULTIES OF HIS MISSION—OCCUPATIONS OF HIS LEISURE—EXTRACTS FROM HIS CORRESPONDENCE—DECORATION OF THE GREAT HALL OF WHITEHALL—RETURN TO ANTWERP—RUBENS RESUMES HIS STUDIOUS LIFE—MARRIAGE WITH HELENA FOURMENT (DECEMBER 6, 1630), AND HIS REASONS FOR THE SAME.



PEN AND INK DRAWING  
(The Louvre.)

**H**IS hurried departure for England allowed Rubens only two or three days at Antwerp, in which to see his sons, and his intimate friends, and to settle his most urgent business. After so prolonged an absence, this brief visit to his home was not a source of unmixed pleasure, for writing a few months later to Dupuy and Peiresc (letters dated from London, August 8 and 9, 1629) he complained of the necessity of again leaving Antwerp, "where

his presence was most necessary. . . . He would have found more

interest in seeing so many different countries in such a short time when he was young. His frame was then more robust, and could endure the fatigue of travelling, and he should have been able to turn his intercourse with so many different nations to great account. Now his powers were declining, and the only advantage to be derived from so much exertion was that of dying a little better informed. But the interesting things that he saw during his travels brought him some consolation."

On May 22, 1629, the Secretary of State, Sir Francis Cottington, who knew the reason of Rubens's visit to England, wrote to Don Carlos Coloma in Flanders, that Charles I. was well satisfied with the mission, "not only on account of the proposals which Rubens brought, but also because of his desire to make the acquaintance of a man of such merit." He sent a safe conduct for the artist with the letter, and Rubens embarked at Dunkirk with his brother-in-law, Hendrick Brant, in an English vessel, which had just brought back a gentleman of Lorraine, the Marquis de Villé, who was returning to his native land. Rubens reached London on June 5, and took up his quarters at the house of his friend, Balthasar Gerbier, whom the king had ordered to receive Rubens, defraying all his expenses. The painter, as we have seen, was not unknown to the king of England; Charles possessed one of his early pictures, *Judith and Holofernes*, and had a few years before the artist's visit to England, asked for his portrait through the English minister at Brussels,<sup>1</sup> "with such urgency," wrote Rubens at the time (letter to Valavès, January 10, 1625), "that there was no possibility of refusing him, although it scarcely seemed correct for me to send my portrait to a prince of such high rank, but he has overcome my modesty." The King invited the painter to visit him at Greenwich on his arrival, and gave him a most gracious welcome.

Both France and Spain naturally desired England's friendship, and the chief ministers of the two countries, Richelieu and Olivarès, did their utmost to obtain her alliance. The British Court hesitated, and

<sup>1</sup> This is the fine portrait now at Windsor. A reproduction forms the frontispiece to this volume.

sought to enhance the value of her assistance by a policy of delay. The small fry of minor states fluttered round these leaders in the game, going from one to the other; the Republic of Venice, the Duke of Lorraine, the Duke of Savoy, and the Count Palatine in turns proposed schemes, each desiring to do the best for himself. These intrigues complicated the situation, causing the aspect of things to change every instant; the ambassadors of the interested nations dared not go very far for fear of overstepping their powers, for the unexpected changes in the position of affairs made new instructions continually necessary. Communication with England, moreover, was subject to long delays, caused by storms at sea and the pending hostilities between the different nations; very often when the long-awaited instructions arrived, the circumstances in which they had been demanded no longer existed. In spite of his rapid journey, Rubens experienced this difficulty; in setting forth the purpose of his mission to Charles I., he learned from the King that, tired of the Spanish delays, he had concluded a treaty of alliance with France on April 24. But this, according to Charles, was not a sufficient reason for breaking off the projected negotiations; with certain reservations, chiefly regarding the truce proposed by Philip IV., he authorised Rubens to discuss the Spanish proposals with his ministers. Rubens was not taken at a disadvantage, for he was able to inform Charles that Philip, on his part, was considering an alliance with France, and that if England persisted in her attitude, the project would become a reality. The painter-diplomatist's letters of credit were delivered to Sir Francis Cottington, and to Richard Weston, the Lord Treasurer, and the king appointed the Earl of Pembroke to take part in their conferences.

In London as at Madrid, Philip IV's. envoy incurred the distrust of the Venetian Ambassador, who was closely bound to France. Alvise Contarini regarded Rubens's arrival with the utmost disfavour, and described him in his despatches as "an ambitious, grasping man, who probably wishes to get himself talked about, and to obtain large gifts." Joachimi, the envoy of the United Provinces, was equally ill-disposed

towards him, and sought every opportunity of thwarting him. But the artist found the kindest support from Lorenzo Barozzi, the Duke of Savoy's envoy, and became very friendly with him. He heard mass every morning at his house, and as both were working for the same end, they informed each other of their respective progress. A few days after Rubens was settled in London, they nearly perished together, victims of an accident to the boat in which they were going to Greenwich. Through a hasty movement of one of the passengers, the small craft capsized; Rubens fell into the water, and was picked up by a waterman who happened to be in the vicinity; Barozzi was saved with great difficulty, after sinking three times, but the chaplain who accompanied them was drowned.

Rubens's reputation had preceded him to England, and he was soon valued there for himself. He won Charles I.'s favour, and after a few meetings, inspired the ministers with the fullest confidence. Amidst the numerous questions touched on in the conferences, he never lost sight of the chief purpose of his mission. He avoided giving any opinion on the various expedients proposed to him; he stated that his powers were strictly limited to arranging a truce with a view to a definitive treaty of peace, the conclusion of which would be left to ambassadors appointed for the purpose. But he fully understood the gravity of the affair, and in one day (June 30), wrote Olivarès three letters to keep him informed of the situation. He saw from the first the extent of the concessions that England would make, and as the resolutions there taken depended both on the king and his ministers, and were subject to great variation, he urged Olivarès to come to a clear and rapid decision at Madrid, otherwise his efforts would be paralysed. The French ambassador was expected daily, and it was certain that insisting on the engagements entered into on one side and the other, he would do his best to parry the Spanish proposals, and to render the alliance just signed more binding.

On July 2, Rubens wrote again to Olivarès, urging him to send an ambassador from Spain at once; England promised to send simultane-

ously a plenipotentiary with power to conclude. But neither London nor Madrid seemed inclined to the prompt measures suggested by Rubens. The arrival of Châteauneuf, the French ambassador, increased Charles I.'s hesitation; the king's chief aim seemed to be to prevent the artist from losing patience. But Rubens was not content with Charles's vague assurances of friendship; he asked and obtained a written note from him in which, with great regret, he undertook "on his royal faith," not to make any league with France to the prejudice



THE TRIUMPH OF JULIUS CÆSAR. AFTER MANTEGNA.  
(National Gallery.)

of Spain, during the duration of the treaty which was about to be concluded. Sometimes Rubens gave Olivarès interesting details about the English Court. "The king," he wrote on July 22, "is very fond of his wife, and she has great influence over her husband. The gentlemen of the Court live in magnificent and costly style." They keep open house, show an exceeding extravagance in everything, for which many of them "can only provide by trafficking in public and private affairs for ready money." He added that Cardinal Richelieu was aware of the fact, and had won many adherents in London by his

liberality ; his emissary Furston was ordered to offer the lord treasurer a large sum of money if he would support the French minister's views.

The delay and indecision with which he was confronted very nearly made Rubens lose patience. He had no liking for ambiguous situations, and the duplicity with which he was constantly met disgusted him. Perhaps because he was tired of these tergiversations, he ventured a little farther than Olivarès approved ; the Spanish minister informed him somewhat sharply in one of his letters that he had overstepped his instructions. Rubens, in reply, strong in his conscience and honesty, " begged to be allowed to return to Antwerp ; not that he did not place the service of his Majesty before his own interests, but seeing that for the moment there was nothing to be done in London, he thought that a longer sojourn there would be a disadvantage to him." The artist had a strong sense of dignity, and could not endure that his services should be depreciated : he was, however, soon to receive by way of compensation, testimony of the approval which, following the incident, was lavished on him from all sides. When Weston and Cottington heard that Rubens wished to leave England, they wrote to Olivarès praising his intelligence and exquisite tact. Philip IV, asked his aunt to tell her painter " that he was not to break off the negotiations entrusted to his well-proved wisdom." And lastly, the members of the Spanish Junta, on two occasions, praised and thanked the negotiator for his zeal and devotion.

But notwithstanding these flattering assurances, Rubens keenly felt the vexation of losing time which he might have employed to so much greater advantage. He turned his leisure moments to account, however, by painting three copies after Mantegna's cartoons of the *Triumph of Julius Caesar* ; they appear in his inventory with the note " *unfinished*" : only one, now in the National Gallery, has come down to us. When he was living at Mantua, he had probably admired these masterly compositions in the theatre of that town, where they were exhibited. But in spite of the generally received opinion, we think





... his anxiety through his... the kind... a large... of his... the... view.

The... and... which he was... very nearly... patience. He had no... with... and the... which he was... the... Perhaps because he was... he... a... further than... Spanish... informed him... of his... he had... the... to his... and... to... letters... to be... a... and could not...

*Portrait of Marie de' Medici.*

(THE LOUVRE.)

... of the approved... from all sides... advised to... and... that he... to his... of the Spanish... for his... and...

... however... the... with the... down... admired... where they were... that



Printed by Draeger, Paris.



that Rubens painted the copies, not at Mantua, but at the Court of Charles I., who had just bought the originals with the Gonzaga collection. The free interpretation, the personal spirit, and the easy certainty of the handling denote Rubens's full maturity. He translates his illustrious forerunner's work with complete independence, changing it, suppressing figures, if he so pleases, or adding fresh ones corresponding better with his idea of the antique. He adds to the pomp of the triumphal procession the beauty of the landscape in which he places it, the animation, the sense of life, and all the picturesque qualities that he was soon to manifest with marvellous abundance in the general effect of the decorations devised for the solemn entry of the Archduke Ferdinand into Antwerp.

But such work was a rare piece of good fortune, for in London no more than at Madrid did he find artists with whom he could associate. The emigrant manufacturers, driven from Flanders by the persecutions that stained their land with blood, brought, it is true, the tribute of their work to England. The growing prosperity of the country had enabled kings and great nobles to attract thither an artist like Holbein and to keep him there; but in spite of the increasing luxury, no name of any importance can be mentioned after his. Obscure painters like Horebout of Ghent and the Geraerts of Bruges provided the crown with court painters during two generations. Van Dyck, who settled in London three years later, had only paid a brief visit there in 1620, and G. Honthorst, who had come from Utrecht by the King's command the year before, had soon returned to his native land.

But although London lacked artists, Rubens could enjoy the society of scholars, who were more numerous in London than at Madrid; he met in Spain "many learned men, but generally of an austere temper, like the most bigoted theologians." Rubens was astonished at the treasures in the English collections. He wrote to P. Dupuy (August 8, 1629): "The island in which I now am, seems to me a place well worthy the curiosity of a man of taste, not only on account of the charm of the country, the beauty of the race, the outward appearance

of luxury proper to a wealthy people, happy in the enjoyment of peace ; but also on account of the incredible number of excellent pictures, statues, and antique inscriptions possessed by the Court. I need not speak here of the Arundel marbles that you first told me of, and I confess that I have seen nothing rarer in the way of antiques than the treaties between Smyrna and Magnesia, with the edicts of the two cities. I greatly regret that Selden, to whom we owe the publication of these, has turned from such noble studies to take part in the political dissensions, an occupation that seems to me to agree ill with the elevation of his mind and the extent of his learning; he ought not therefore to rail at Fortune because, provoking the anger of an indignant king during the seditious disturbances, he was thrown into prison with other members of Parliament."

When Rubens wrote thus, he seemed blind to the internal situation of England ; a short time before, indeed, struck by Buckingham's insolence and frivolity, he had predicted with almost prophetic foresight the terrible consequences that the policy of Charles I.'s favourite would bring on royalty itself. Since that time events had marched rapidly, and John Selden, whom Rubens knew chiefly as an archæologist, had, as a lawyer and a member of Parliament, protested against the encroachments of the Crown in imposing taxes that he considered illegal. He was imprisoned at the beginning of 1629, and only set free in 1634. He was just one of those scholars in whose society Rubens would have delighted. The year before Selden had published, with commentaries, a translation of all the inscriptions belonging to the Earl of Arundel.<sup>1</sup> Rubens, who had painted for the Earl the admirable portrait group in the Munich Gallery, had been on friendly terms with him for a long time ; to compensate for Selden, he met at the Earl's house Franciscus Junius, a German by birth, who entered Arundel's service in 1620, and became his librarian. Junius was employed in making researches on the painting of the ancients, a study well calculated to interest Rubens. On the publication of his book : *De Picturâ Veterum*, printed at

<sup>1</sup> *Marmora Arundeliana*, London, 1628. 4to. The marbles are also known as the *Oxford Marbles*.

Amsterdam a few years later, the artist told him of the pleasure he had had in reading the work; he praised its composition highly, wishing that Junius would write a treatise on Italian painting with the like care.

The marbles which formed the Arundel collection were brought from Asia Minor in 1627, and had just been placed in the fine house that the Earl had built himself on the banks of the Thames. It contained 37 statues and 128 busts, exhibited in a gallery with altars, sarcophagi, jewels, and all sorts of objects found in the excavations of Paros. The marbles bearing inscriptions were let into the walls of the garden adjoining the splendid edifice. By a strange chance, the marbles had nearly become the property of Peiresc, for whom



STUDY OF A HORSE.  
(The Louvre.)

they had been bought in the Levant for 50 louis by one of his agents named Samson. But just when they were ready to be forwarded to Provence, the owners made some pretext and delayed sending them; they had been induced by the offer of a slightly higher sum made them by a certain William Petty to sell them to the Earl of Arundel. Rubens naturally took the greatest delight in seeing and studying so many valuable works. Although he begged Dupuy to

show Peiresc the letter he wrote on August 8, the artist wrote himself to Peiresc the next day, as if he wished to make up for "the silence of nearly a whole year" which their correspondence had undergone. He regretted the obstacles that had prevented his passing through Provence on his return from Spain. "Had he been free to dispose of his life as he pleased, he should have already been to visit him, and might have been with him at this very moment. . . . He had not entirely given up the hope of a journey to Italy, his greatest desire," and he did not wish to die without realising it. His happiness would be complete if he could greet his friend in the fair land of Provence, and profit by his delightful conversation. He praised to Peiresc, as he had to Dupuy, the numerous resources offered him by "the island in which, instead of the barbarism to be expected in such a climate, at so great a distance from the culture of Italy," there are so many fine collections, such as those of the King, that of the late Duke of Buckingham, in which he found many works that had belonged to himself, and, above all, that of the Earl of Arundel. If he was deprived of the conversation of Selden, whose imprisonment he deplored, he could at least talk with "Cotton, the great antiquary, remarkable for the extent of his learning, and the secretary Boswell, whom Peiresc ought also to know, for he was acquainted with everybody whom the world reckons distinguished. Boswell is going to show him certain passages concerning Theodora's debauches, omitted in Procopius's *Anecdota Arcana*, and probably suppressed for propriety's sake in Alemanni's edition, but which had been printed from an unpublished manuscript in the Vatican."

Rubens was interested in science as well as in history and archæology, and he mentioned to Peiresc a Dutch scholar named Drebbel, living in England, to whom he had often referred in his letters. "I have as yet only met him in the street, when I exchanged two or three words with him, because he lives now in the country at some distance from London. It is with him like certain things of which Machiavelli speaks, which, in the opinion of the common herd, seem greater far off than near, for I am assured that for many years no other invention has been seen of his but the optical instrument, which



placed perpendicularly above objects, enlarges them immeasurably, or the glass ring, which is supposed to realise perpetual motion, and which is, in fact, a mere toy. The machines and engines which he constructed to aid La Rochelle were useless. I should not like to depreciate so famous a man on the faith of public rumour; in order to form an opinion about him, I must see him in his own house, and, if possible, converse with him. I never remember seeing a more extraordinary countenance than his, and there is something strange about his ragged and coarsely dressed person that exposes him to ridicule.”<sup>1</sup> Rubens was not blinded by reputations, and did not accept ready-made opinions; he liked to have personal intercourse with people before forming any judgment on them.

The artist expressed in this letter as in that written the day before to Dupuy, a strong desire to return soon to Antwerp, “where his presence was much needed.” The welcome he received in London did not lead him to forget his beloved home. He was, however, much liked by the king and the English aristocracy; the Earl of Carlisle took him driving every day in his carriage; ministers and great personages gave fêtes for him; when he visited Cambridge with Hendrick Brant, his brother-in-law, the Senate conferred on him a graceful distinction, the honorary degree of Master of Arts. But such amusements and honours did not compensate for the wasted hours of an existence for which he felt himself less and less suited. The news of his son's illness added to his impatience; on December 15, 1629, in a letter to his friend Gevaert, thanking him for his kindness to the youth, he expressed regret at the increase of work Brant's absence entailed on him in the carrying on of municipal business, and begged him to have patience till their return, which he hoped would be very speedy. In order to hasten it, he urged on Olivarès the necessity of making all suitable concessions in view of coming to an agreement. “I have,” he said, “neither the talent nor the rank to give your excellency

<sup>1</sup> Huygens, who was intimate with Drebbel, as he was with Bacon, judges him less severely than Rubens does, and in mentioning his invention of the microscope, enlarges in a truly prophetic spirit on the importance it will have for the study of Nature.

advice ; but this peace seems to me most important, and the aim and desire of all the confederations of Europe, so that the mere idea of it produces great effect." But in spite of Rubens's earnest entreaties, questions of etiquette at the two Courts regarding the departure of the plenipotentiaries still delayed matters, added to which Don Carlos Coloma, the ambassador-designate of Spain, found it impossible to leave the military operations he was directing in the Low



MINERVA PROTECTING PEACE AGAINST WAR.  
(National Gallery.)

Countries. But Coloma's departure was at length announced, and Rubens wrote to Olivarès on December 14 with evident satisfaction, that, in accordance with the permission he had received, he was making his preparations to return home a few days after Coloma's arrival, "for he could not delay his departure any longer without great hurt to his domestic affairs, which were going to ruin through his long absence of eighteen months ; his presence alone could set things right."

But the return so impatiently awaited was again postponed by the tardy arrival of Coloma, who did not reach London until January 11,

1630, and then kept Rubens with him for six weeks. The Infanta authorised the proceeding that she might be kept informed of all the negotiations in which Rubens had taken part.

Rubens definitely took leave of the King of England at Whitehall on March 3. In recognition of his esteem, Charles I. conferred knighthood on Rubens, and added to the honour the gift of a sword, adorned



SKETCH FOR THE CEILING AT WHITEHALL.  
(Brussels Gallery.)

with precious stones, a gold chain, a diamond ring that he wore himself, and a hatband set with diamonds, of the value of £480. Three days after, Rubens left London, bearing a special passport from the King, begging the States of Holland not to place difficulties in his way, should the vessel in which he was sailing meet their ships. But the passage was uneventful. On his return to Brussels the Infanta determined that he should receive the salary belonging to his office as secretary of the Privy Council, although he had not exercised his

functions, as a recognition of the devotion and intelligence of which "her painter" had given proof during his mission. The heraldic laws prevailing in Flanders made it impossible for the title of knight conferred on Rubens by Charles I. to become effective without an authorisation from the Crown. The artist asked for the required permission, "pointing out the more brilliant position, and the greater authority that would accrue to him on the occasions that might offer of serving His Majesty." On the recommendation of the Infanta, the Junta of Madrid recalled the fact that "the Emperor Charles V. had made Titian a knight of St. James," and that the important services of the petitioner, as well as his office of secretary to His Majesty would prevent "the concession of such a favour forming any precedent for other artists," and they decided to grant the request. Its adoption was confirmed by Philip IV., on August 20, 1631. From that day the painter added to the ancient arms of his family a *canton gules with a lion or*, borrowed from the royal escutcheon of England: it figures on the coat of arms engraved on the altar of the Rubens chapel in the Church of St. Jacques.

The expenses of the diplomatic journeys made in 1629 and 1630 by the master "going and coming in the service of his Majesty," were settled on May 24, 1631, for 12374 Flemish pounds, a very moderate sum, considering the length and duration of the journeys. Fortunately the artist's interests did not greatly suffer from his residences abroad, for just as had happened in Spain, he received in England a commission for a very important work, the decoration of the ceiling of the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall, for £3,000 sterling. For some time, even during the preceding reign, it had been proposed to entrust the work to Rubens; and now after many delays the matter was settled. We do not know if the master painted the sketches in London, and submitted them to Charles I., or if they were executed after his return to Antwerp. But the decoration can only be appreciated now from the sketches originally in the King of England's collection, one giving the general effect, others studies of the details; the condition of the paintings, damaged by damp and by numerous



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*Triptych of St. Ildefonso.*

(VIENNA GALLERY.)



Printed by Wittmann Paris (France)





restorations, is very bad. The canvases, stretched and blistered, tarnished and darkened, have preserved nothing of the freshness and brilliance which was their chief merit, and which is now only apparent in the sketches.

The decoration consists of nine paintings joined together by ornaments, and celebrates the good government and the apotheosis of James I. They are pure allegories of little interest, applicable to the glorification of any sovereign. The arrangement undoubtedly shows the artist's consummate skill by the easy breadth of the conceptions, and the ingenuity with which the figures are grouped in the rectilinear or curved frames they had to fill on the ceiling. But the personifications of vices and virtues are even more trite than those with which the Medici Gallery abounds. The enforced idleness and long vexations of his mission seem to have left Rubens a little rusty, or without energy enough to give the old symbols new forms. He had not practised his art for some time, and drew too complacently on the fund of ill-defined allegories always at his disposal, insufficiently characterised by their attributes, and as unmeaning as the rhetorical passages with which the court-poets filled the panegyrics of the sovereigns whose generosity they hoped to stimulate. Here and there amidst the commonplaces, there are a few figures of a more individual imagination, charming like the genii who disport themselves amid the pleasing confusion of the two small friezes, or grandiose and vigorous like those in the group of *Hercules confounding Envy*. Rubens had this picturesque group engraved by C. Jegher. The sketches, now scattered in several collections (that of Baron Oppenheim at Cologne, the Lacaze Gallery at the Louvre, the Vienna Academy, and the Hermitage), especially that of the *Benefits of the King's Reign* recently purchased by the Brussels Gallery, have the swift, vivacious execution, the animation, the noble rhythm, and the ample brilliance which mark the artist's maturity.

On August 11, 1634, the pictures were almost finished; but as Rubens knew the poverty of the royal treasury, he did not hurry to send them. Gout prevented him from keeping his promise to the

king, that he would go himself to England to hang them. As they had been rolled up in his studio for some time, cracks had appeared in the canvases, but he repaired the damage himself. In July, 1635, Charles I. undertook to defray the expenses of the transmission of the cases containing the paintings, and on October 8, they were handed over to the charge of an English merchant named Wake, living at Antwerp; he forwarded them to London, where they arrived about the end of December. Rubens appointed a competent person, probably one of his pupils, to superintend their installation. Six years had passed since the commission was given him, and he had still long to wait for payment. In a letter to Peiresc, dated March 16, 1636, he wrote: "As I loathe courts, I have deputed another to take my work to England. It is now actually in its place, and according to my friends, his Majesty is well pleased. I have not yet received any money, a circumstance that would surprise me if I were a novice in these matters." The first payment of £800 sterling was only made on November 28, 1637, and the last of £730 seven months later, on June 4, 1638, by the intermediary of Lionel Wake, to whom Rubens had given full power to act for him. On March 24 of the following year, Wake was commanded to deliver to the artist a gold chain weighing  $82\frac{1}{2}$  oz., probably as a testimony of the king's satisfaction with the work.

Another work painted by Rubens during his visit to England was presented by him to Charles I., the *Minerva protecting Peace against War*. It was sold at the king's death with his collections, and passed into Italy, where it was bought at the beginning of this century. The Marquis of Stafford presented it to the National Gallery in 1828. Its various peregrinations have damaged the picture, and it has become very dark. It is a pure allegory. By clothing the figures personifying war in sombre colours, and relegating them to the second plane, Rubens sought to bring out the bright tones in which he painted the Plenty and the Benefits of Peace of the foreground. It was a fresh argument invented by him in favour of "the fair masterpiece of peace," the accomplishment of which he

had tried to obtain. Another point, equally significant, proves that such was his thought. We notice in the front of the picture, a young girl and two little children, whose types occur in a large family group known to us now only from MacArdell's engraving, which represents Balthasar Gerbier's wife and four children.<sup>1</sup> Rubens, as we stated above, enjoyed Gerbier's hospitality during his visit to London; he also arranged and carried on with him



STUDY FOR THE ST. GEORGE AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE.  
(Berlin Print Room.)

the peace negotiations which employed them both for several years. In introducing the charming figures of his colleague's children in a symbolical painting, Rubens placed before the sovereign a picture which recalled the memory and the success of their mutual enterprise.

<sup>1</sup> In the Queen's Collection at Windsor, and in the Brussels Gallery, there are pictures which, with a few variations, reproduce the arrangement and the types of the Gerbier portrait group; the original has disappeared. It is not possible to recognise in either of the two paintings the work of Rubens or of Van Dyck, although they have been attributed to both masters. They are old copies of the original, with slight changes. In Earl Spencer's Gallery at Althorp there is a study of the second of Gerbier's little girls, a copy of which is in the Lille Museum.

According to Walpole<sup>1</sup> Rubens also painted in London for Charles I. the *St. George in a Landscape*, an animated, picturesque piece of work, in the Buckingham Palace collection, where it hangs in such a bad light that it is almost impossible to appreciate its merits. The colour has darkened, but the handling is of great delicacy, judging from certain conspicuous figures, such as the St. Agnes, and the horseman carrying St. George's standard. As a delicate attention the artist gave St. George the king's features; the St. Agnes has those of the queen, Henrietta Maria, as she was painted by Van Dyck in several portraits. Walpole says that the broad river in the landscape is the Thames, and the building the base of which it washes, Richmond Palace.

The National Gallery has also possessed, since 1885, a sketch formerly in the Hamilton collection, painted by Rubens either in England, or soon after his return to Flanders, to serve as a model for a silver salver executed for Charles I. by a skilled goldsmith of Antwerp, Theodore Rogiers or De Razier.<sup>2</sup> Rogier was a member of the Guild of St. Luke, and of the Society of Rhetoric, the *Gilliflower*; he was often in Rubens's studio, and was the friend of the most eminent painters of his day. The *grisaille* sketch of the *Birth of Venus*, painted for him by the master, attests once more the suppleness of Rubens's talent. The general lines of the composition harmonise most happily with the forms to which they are adapted, and the groups they contain; their flowing curves agree with the character of the scenes represented, and with the figures of the marine deities, whose frolics are developed in graceful spirals. In a mediocre plate by J. Neefs, we see that the ewer for the salver was adorned with a *Judgment of Paris*, utilised later by Rubens in a picture painted for Philip IV., and now in the Prado.

To complete our brief account of Rubens's diplomatic missions, we may add that after the conclusion of the treaty between England

<sup>1</sup> *Anecdotes of Painting*, London, 1871, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> The Razier family produced several generations of gold-chasers to whom M. P. Génard devoted an excellent notice in the *Bulletin Rubens*, vol. i., p. 224-246.

and Spain, there was a talk of appointing him resident in London during the absence of Coloma, who was recalled to Flanders. But although the members of the Junta were unanimous in recognising Rubens's services, it seemed difficult for them, as the Count d'Oñate said in the course of the discussion, "to give the title of his Majesty's minister to a man living by the work of his hands." The secretary, Juan de Nicolalde, was appointed instead, but, although Rubens remained at Antwerp, he continued to occupy himself with politics; we find in the treasury accounts of Flanders under the date November 17, 1631, a note of a fresh allotment to the painter of "500 pounds, to be employed in secret matters concerning which it is not needful to make any further statement." It is very doubtful if Rubens would have agreed to quit Antwerp again, although his appointment as resident minister would have been very well received in London, where he had made the most favourable impression. Replying to a letter of April 6, 1631, in which Philip IV. mentioned to the Princess Isabella the possibility of sending him back to England if she thought his presence there would be useful, the ruler of the Low Countries said (June 8, 1631), that she had no intention of entrusting Rubens with a new mission, "for which there was no occasion. She had not seen in him any disposition to accept such an appointment unless it had been but for a few days."

The artist was tired of so much travelling, and disgusted with politics; on returning home after so long an absence, he took all his old pleasure in his domestic circle and his tranquil, studious life. He had, of course, to pay several visits to Brussels to give the Infanta an account of his mission, and any explanations she might desire about pending negotiations. Thus we learn from two letters of Balthasar Moretus to Jan van Vucht, that Rubens did not resume his painting until the end of June, 1630. One of his pupils, W. Panneels, who had entered his studio in 1628, had carefully watched over his master's interests during his two years' absence abroad, and in a deposition made on June 1, 1630, before the aldermen of Antwerp, Rubens congratulated himself on the care that Panneels had taken of his

house. But the greater number of his pupils had left him, probably to seek their own livelihood, and Rubens had to think of replacing them to some extent, in view not only of the Whitehall decorations, but also of the paintings for the Henry IV. gallery.

Rubens found again at Antwerp besides his beloved painting, his sons, intimate friends like Rockox and Gevaert, and all that made life pleasant. Archæology still continued to hold the largest place among the things that interested him, and his correspondence with his French friends turns largely on that subject. Peiresc gave him a great pleasure in associating him with one of those collector's delights to which both were so sensitive. Peiresc had retired to his estate of Belgentier, to avoid the plague which was devastating the south, and thence forwarded a packet to Antwerp containing drawings of several of his most recent purchases, notably a remarkable antique tripod discovered at Fréjus the year before. Peiresc thought in this way "to tickle" the artist pleasantly, and to provoke from him some learned commentary on the different acquisitions. Rubens was keenly delighted, and on August 10, wrote to his correspondent offering him a "thousand thanks." He had told Gevaert of his good fortune, and also "the very learned master Wendelin, who chanced to be at Antwerp just then." Examining the drawings in turn, he paid the greatest attention to the famous tripod, and sent Peiresc the comments he desired. He passed in swift review the different kinds of antique tripods, and mentioned their various uses. Letters in the margin of the epistle refer to rough sketches drawn on a separate sheet. In order that nothing might be wanting to the discussion, Rubens's son, Albert, "who is beginning to study archæology seriously," and had therefore great respect for Peiresc, copied a page of extracts from ancient authors in which the different kinds of tripods were described. Here was a practical method of appreciating antique works of art; Rubens was specially well adapted to exercise it, for while his scholarship provided him with material for commentaries, his special talent enabled him to make drawings of the objects named. He warmly congratulated Peiresc on the accuracy of the

drawings he had sent him, and declared them "excellent, and as perfect as the best that could be done in that style." He hoped his friend would "keep the clever young man who was responsible for them near him." In all probability the young man was Claude Mellan, whom Peiresc had already employed either in France or Italy, and who, on his way back from Rome, visited Provence, and drew the portrait of his host that he afterwards engraved, a reproduction of which Peiresc now sent Rubens. Rubens told Peiresc how greatly he liked the portrait, and how those who saw it at his house were struck by the likeness. Yet he confessed "that he did not find in the countenance the light of intelligence and of greatness which seemed



PORTRAIT OF NICOLAS CLAUDE FABRI DE PEIRESC.  
(Facsimile of the engraving by Claude Mellan.)

to him characteristic of his genius, but it was not a thing easy to express in painting." Writing soon after to Pierre Dupuy,<sup>1</sup> the artist mentioned the pleasure that Peiresc's packet and "his habitual kindness" had given him. He also spoke of his grief at Spinola's death; it took place on September 25, and was hastened by the anxieties that he had had to bear in Spain. "He was tired of living," he added, "and in a letter written when he was quite well, he said: I hope God will allow me to leave this life in September, or even before. . . . I lose in him one of the best friends and patrons I ever had, as a hundred letters can testify."

<sup>1</sup> Contrary to custom this letter is written in French, because it was to be shown to the Abbé of St. Ambroise.

Unfortunately these letters have not come down to us ; but we recognise Rubens's affectionate nature, and the grateful remembrance he had of Spinola's kindness. In spite, too, of the pleasure he took in his work, he deeply felt the emptiness of the big house, in which he had spent so many happy days. His loneliness began to oppress him. Although he had doubtless had many opportunities of marrying again, he had rejected the various suggestions made to him on the matter. A letter written four years later (December 18, 1630) contains the personal reasons that finally influenced him. It is addressed to Peiresc ; after apologising for his long silence, he speaks quite openly, knowing that he might frankly confide in him. " I determined to marry again," he wrote, " because I did not feel myself old enough to be condemned to perpetual celibacy, and after a period of self-denial, it is sweet to enjoy permitted pleasures. I have chosen a young wife from an honourable middle-class family, although everybody wanted me to choose some one from the Court circle. But I feared the evil quality of pride which generally accompanies rank, and is especially strong in high-born women. I preferred a woman who would not be ashamed to see me handle my brushes, and to be quite honest, I should have found it hard to barter my precious liberty for the embraces of an old woman. Such are the events of my life since I last wrote to you." With his invariable prudence and wisdom Rubens paid no heed to the suggestions of those who wished him to make the brilliant marriage to which his great position allowed him to aspire, a marriage which would have " fixed " him at court. He wisely feared to enter a society that might have entailed the loss of his independence, the renunciation of his friends, and of the practice of his art. But he did not tell Peiresc that for all his wisdom and his fifty-three years, he had fallen passionately in love with a girl of sixteen. The girl whose freshness and youthful beauty had so completely charmed him was Helena Fourment.

He had known her family for a long time, and was even connected with it. Helena's brother, Daniel Fourment—he bore the same Christian name as his father—married on September 22, 1619, Clara Brant,





*Portrait of the Duke of Buckingham.*

(ALBERTINA COLLECTION.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)



Printed by Draeger, Paris.



a sister of Isabella, Rubens's first wife. Helena was the youngest of Daniel's ten children; she was baptised on April 1, 1614, at the Church of St. Jacques. The artist had often seen her in her parents' house, for he painted numerous portraits of Susanna, one of her seven sisters, married to Arnold Lunden, the Master of the Mint, notably the celebrated picture in the National Gallery, known as the *Chapeau de Poil*. About 1624-25, he painted magnificent portraits of another sister, Clara Fourment, and her husband, Pieter van Hecke. These pictures, which belong to Baron Edmond de Rothschild, are in marvellous preservation, and their brilliant colour and life-like rendering cause them to be reckoned among the strongest and best of the master's works. One of Helena's brothers-in-law, Nicholas Picquery, who lived at Marseilles, had always assisted Rubens to send parcels to Peiresec, and Rubens had recommended his kindly intermediary to the favour of the Provençal scholar.

The large dowry that her parents gave Helena, in spite of their numerous family, proves that the Fourments were well off: they belonged to the upper middle class, and bore a coat of arms. They overlooked the disproportion in age on account of the advantages such a marriage offered their daughter. Attracted by the master's fame and high position, and perhaps touched by his ardent love, she accepted his hand. His passion did not deprive Rubens of his practical good sense, and before the wedding, he carefully settled his sons' affairs. On November 29, 1630, he presented his accounts to the guardians, and obtained a discharge for the maternal inheritance reverting to the two minors. On December 4, the marriage settlements were signed in the presence of the members of the family, before the notary Toussaint Guyot. In the deed Rubens is described as "Knight, Secretary to His Majesty's Privy Council, and Gentleman of the Household of her Serene Highness the Princess Isabella." The young girl's parents, Daniel Fourment and Clara Stappaert, gave her a dowry of "3,000 Flemish pounds income, and promised to pay besides 129 Flemish pounds, 12 escalins income inherited by her from the late dame Catherine Fourment, her sister, and also to provide her with

a handsome trousseau. If the wife survived her husband, she was to retain and keep all her clothes, jewels, woollen and linen goods, unreservedly, as well as a jointure of 22,000 caroli, paid once for all, to be deducted from the property of the future husband." If Helena predeceased her husband, Rubens was to receive as jointure on his part, 8,000 caroli, paid once for all. As if to emphasise the concord of the two families, all the members present signed with the couple and Helena's parents. Two days after, on December 6, 1630, the marriage was celebrated at the Church of St. Jacques, with all the splendour and ceremony befitting the position of the couple. By the deed of contract, the bride's parents had promised "to defray the expenses of the wedding ceremony in such a way as to deserve honour and thanks."



STUDY FOR THE APOTHEOSIS OF A PRINCE.

(National Gallery.)

(The original is in the possession of Lord Jersey at Osterley Park.)



THE TAKING OF PARIS BY HENRY IV. (SKETCH.)  
(Berlin Museum.)

## CHAPTER VI

PORTRAITS OF HELENA FOURMENT, COMPOSITIONS INSPIRED BY HER—THE “WALK IN THE GARDEN”—TRIPTYCH OF ST. ILDEFONSO, PAINTED FOR THE PRINCESS ISABELLA—SKETCHES AND PICTURES FOR THE HENRY IV. GALLERY—MARIE DE’ MEDICI EXILED TO COMPIÈGNE—HER FLIGHT TO FLANDERS—RUBENS IS ATTACHED TO HER SERVICE DURING HIS RESIDENCE THERE—MISSIONS ENTRUSTED TO HIM BY THE INFANTA—THE DUKE OF AERSCHOT’S GROSS CONDUCT TOWARDS HIM—DEATH OF THE ARCHDUCHESS ISABELLA (DECEMBER 1, 1633).



PLATE FROM THE SKETCH-BOOK.  
(Engraving by P. Pontius.)

A NEW life, filled with the love of the young girl who was henceforth the light of his home, began for Rubens with his marriage. She brought the animation and gaiety of youth to the big house, and supplied her husband with the most charming model he could have desired. He took up his brushes again for her sake, and the girl’s freshness and brilliant complexion were well calculated to enchant him.

Each year had seen him increasingly occupied with problems of light and movement; but his wife gave a new brilliance to his palette, and his portraits of Helena, the numerous compositions of which she

was the inspiration, resemble a hymn of love and joy. Till the end of his life he never tired of multiplying her image, and she appears in her portraits wearing the most varied and sumptuous costumes, that well set off the charm of her almost infantine face. As she matures we follow the radiant development of her beauty in many exquisite works.

A fine picture in the Munich Gallery represents both husband and wife in the early period of their marriage, walking in the garden of their house. The artist wears a broad-brimmed felt hat, and a black doublet striped with grey. The refined, intelligent head, the proudly turned-up moustaches, the attractive countenance, the distinguished bearing, incline us to regard him as a young man; a few silver threads in the fair beard show us our mistake. His arm is in Helena's; she is painted almost full face, and her pink complexion is protected from the sun by a large straw hat. She looks delightfully ingenuous in all the bloom of her sixteen years. Her hair, with its golden reflected lights, is cut in a fringe over the forehead like that of a boy, and escapes round her face in fair curls. Her black bodice opens over a chemisette; her dull yellow skirt is turned up over a grey petticoat, and a white apron falls over both. She holds a feather fan in her hand, and a pearl necklace sets off the whiteness of her throat. She half turns towards a young page, entirely dressed in red, who follows her bareheaded. The couple approach a portico, beneath which a table is spread beside the statues and busts which decorate it; some bottles have been set to cool in a large basin on the ground. The building, so fantastic in its architecture, which is an eccentric mixture of Italian style and Flemish taste, is the pavilion the artist erected in his garden not far from the house, and often introduced in his pictures. Near at hand an old woman feeds two peacocks; a turkey-cock struts about with his spouse, and a friendly dog runs after their young ones. The air is warm, the lilacs are in bloom; the young orange-trees have been released from their winter quarters, and the flower-beds are gay with many-coloured tulips. At the side, the waters of a fountain, likewise found in many of Rubens's pictures, fall into a basin. The pair are about to seat themselves





XXXII

*Andromeda*

(BERLIN MUSEUM.)



Cliche Hanfstaengl

Printed by Wittmann Paris (France)



under this portico, surrounded by these domestic animals, with the blue sky and the flowers before their eyes, wholly given up to a happiness which is echoed in the holiday mood of surrounding nature.

When we have thoroughly enjoyed this beautiful picture, our eyes involuntarily turn to the other canvas in the same room of the gallery, in which, on an equally fine spring day, Rubens painted himself in a honeysuckle arbour with his wife Isabella, whom he had so affectionately loved, who was so intimately associated with his life, and whose loss he deplored four years earlier in the touching letter to Dupuy quoted above. In the same involuntary fashion it occurs to us that the former marriage was better assorted; the intellectual sympathy must have been greater than it could have been with a young girl who passed so suddenly from the seclusion of her father's house to so conspicuous a position. It would be interesting to learn something of Helena's character, of her culture and education, of her influence on the great man who loved her. But no information on these points is to be found either in the acts of her life, in Rubens's correspondence, or in the testimony of contemporaries. But the large number of portraits of her that Rubens painted bear eloquent witness to the strength and persistence of his love. There is scarcely a gallery of importance without a portrait of her, and at Munich there are four. The little enchantress seems to have adapted herself very quickly to her new position; the perfect ease with which she wears her magnificent costumes furnishes proof of this. One of the Munich portraits is a full length: she is painted full face, in sumptuous attire, and is seated in an arm-chair on a terrace. Her feet rest on an eastern carpet, and above her head a violet curtain hangs between two columns. Her dress is of the richest material; a black satin gown opens over an underskirt of white silk brocade embroidered in gold. The bodice is low enough to reveal the curve of the bust; a high lace collar rises behind the fair hair which frames her face. Her figure has improved, and her beautiful, delicate hands are longer. She seems perhaps a little astonished at herself; but her smiling expression preserves something of the ingenuousness of innocent candour. We wonder whether the spray of orange-blossom in

her hair was placed there by the painter with intention. The execution is admirably delicate, easy, and sure, and the flesh tints, the freshness of which is set off by the blue of the sky, have what De Piles so rightly called "the virginity of Rubens's tints . . . those tints which he employed with so free a hand without mixing them much for fear of corrupting them, and so causing them to lose their brilliance and truth, apparent from the very beginning of the work." The master excels here in giving his work the lightness, spontaneity, and charm which accord so perfectly with the youth of his sitter.

Not to speak of other pictures at the Hague, Amsterdam, and Munich, in which Helena is painted half-length, a full-length portrait in the Hermitage, almost full face, well shows the suppleness of Rubens's talent, and the varied but always picturesque methods that he invented when he repeated a subject dear to him. In this picture, the young woman stands in a natural attitude, her hands crossed; she holds a feather fan in one of them, as in the Munich portraits. The figure, relieved against a low landscape background, is very elegantly posed; the bluish tones of the horizon, the dull sky, brightened only in the upper part by a glimpse of blue, and the black of the costume—guiltless of ornament save for the lilac ribbons on the bodice and sleeves—afford a wonderful accompaniment to the bright, clear notes of the flesh tints. Here again Rubens painted the young woman in the spring time,<sup>1</sup> celebrating her beauty anew in this masterpiece, which is of remarkable brilliance and in fine preservation. It is only equalled by two other large portraits of Helena, formerly in the Blenheim Collection, which now royally adorn the rooms of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild. We shall speak of these pictures later.

Rubens found all his old enthusiasm for his art, now that he was able to take it up again, and to choose the subjects he liked best. Strength, fulness of life, joy in production, breathe from the works of this period, qualities that were lacking during the unsettled and nomad existence of the three preceding years. The Infanta Isabella, anxious to employ her official painter, now gave him an opportunity to show his best qualities. She commissioned him to paint a large

<sup>1</sup> Young fern shoots, and a tuft of violets bloom beneath her feet.

triptych for the high altar of the Brotherhood of St. Ildefonso in the Church of St. Jacques-de-Caudeberg, the parish church of the Court. The brotherhood was founded in 1588 by the Archduke Albert, then governor of Portugal under Philip II., and was recruited among the officers and dependants of his Court. When he and his wife Isabella were made governors of Flanders, he established the order there in 1603. After Albert's

death, his widow undertook to pay the expenses of the decorations of the marble altar of the chapel of St. Ildefonso, and also of the picture Rubens was to paint by her desire, thus consecrating her husband's memory, and that of the foundation due to him. The master seems to have borrowed the general arrangement of the composition from the large canvas painted by him at the beginning of his career for Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga, the ruins of which now hang in the Mantua Museum. The donors, accompanied by their patrons, as in his

youthful work, are painted on the two shutters of the central panel. This was reserved for the principal subject: the Virgin, with four saints, two on either side of her, offering St. Ildefonso the chasuble she had embroidered for him. In this great work, which left Belgium in 1777, and is now in the Vienna Gallery, the master gives the full measure of his best decorative qualities. He sees the



PORTRAIT OF RUBENS. (SKETCH FOR "THE WALK IN THE GARDEN.")

(Albertina Collection.)

(From a Photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)

work as a whole with the breadth of conception which is one of the marks of his genius, and, by a skilful progression, he reserves the greatest brilliance for the centre. On the lateral shutters, the Archduke Albert with his patron, and the Princess Isabella with St. Elizabeth of Hungary, dressed in rich costumes, kneel at the foot of bluish columns between which are glimpses of a grey blue sky. The deep red of the velvet thrown across their prayer-desks, and the red drapery that hangs above their heads, form a magnificent frame to the whole composition. In the central panel—of which there is a sketch in the Hermitage, very happily modified for the definitive work—the four saints who assist at the scene are enveloped in a clear, warm penumbra, while the Virgin, and the three little cherubs who fly above her gilded throne, shine resplendent in the brightest light. Taking each figure separately, we should be justified in criticising the proportions or the types, which are of doubtful elegance, the carelessly ruffled draperies, the lack of style in the attitudes; but although such defects are very real, we forget them when we are confronted with the splendid unity and imposing aspect of this grand work. Seen from a distance, the painting is rich and harmonious, in entire accord with the magnificent ceremonies of the Catholic Church, as they were then organised in Flanders.

The outer sides of the two shutters of the triptych are also at Vienna; they hang side by side, and form one composition, known as the *Holy Family with the Apple-tree*. It differs both in subject and handling from the St. Ildefonso. It is a domestic scene, a veritable piece of bravura, dashed off by the artist with marvellous spirit. Look where we will, we always find delightful and charming details of rustic simplicity; near St. John is his lamb, and in the foreground two rabbits nibble among the foliage by the side of a spring that breaks out into little cascades. The two households rejoice in the children's happiness, and affectionately admire the innocent grace of their movements. Everything in the picture breathes peace and calm; the panel is barely covered, the brush has run over it alert and sure, proceeding by large sweeps, with the ease and freedom possessed by no other painter in the same degree. The ground is a mere rubbing



of bitumen, on which the plants, each with its peculiar characteristics, are indicated; a few white high lights on the transparent blue of the slightly ruffled water give the illusion that it is flowing. Balancing the picture, and bringing out its meaning, as in the *St. Ildefonso*, the sober colouring of the left group rivets attention on the Virgin, and especially on the Infant Jesus, who, with a charming, natural gesture, stretches one of His hands towards the fruits that are offered Him, while He grasps His mother's neck with the other.

A new proof of the suppleness of Rubens's genius, and of the facility with which he turned from the most pleasing to the most austere episodes, may be seen in the *Last Supper*, painted at this period for the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament of the Church of St. Rombaut at Mechlin, and now in the Brera.<sup>1</sup> When Rubens varied his subjects, he likewise varied his manner of treating them and the effects that brought out their special character. The execution of the *Last Supper* is quiet and sedate, and shows a judicious use of chiaroscuro, in contrast with the animated handling and luminous aspect of the *Holy Family with the Apple-tree*. The arrangement recalls that of Titian's *Last Supper* in the Church of St. Francis at Urbino, a picture that Rubens doubtless knew from the engraving. The master obtained an admirable effect by placing the figures of his composition in a circular group, instead of arranging them in a rectilinear line as Leonardo and the Umbrian painters had done. The Apostles are gathered round the table, and, moved by the supreme teaching and revelations of Jesus, they contemplate Him with affectionate love. Only Judas, who occupies a position in the foreground, turns his head away, and thinks of the realisation of his sinister design. By an ingenious contrast the beautiful face of St. John, the beloved disciple, affectionately leaning on Christ's shoulder, is close to the disturbed countenance of the traitor who is about to deliver Jesus to His enemies. The flickering torches which light the apartment enabled Rubens to place insignificant details in shadow, and to bring the more important parts of the picture into

<sup>1</sup> The sketch is in the Hermitage. Two small predelle: the *Entry into Jerusalem*, and the *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet*, which originally formed part of the *Last Supper*, are now in the Dijon Museum.

relief; he thus preserved the appearance of mystery proper to the subject, in the general aspect of the composition.

The arrangement of a *St. Theresa interceding for the Souls in Purgatory* is less happy. It was painted at this period for the Church of the Barefooted Carmelites at Antwerp, which also owned the *Education of the Virgin*. Both are now in the Antwerp Museum. St. Theresa kneels before Christ, who stands in front of her, and implores His mercy for the four sinners who are undergoing the punishment of purgatory. Mary Magdalene is one of the sufferers; fair and plump, she stretches an arm towards an angel, imploring that her penance may be shortened. She does not deserve much pity, for, despite her tearful eyes, her opulent beauty has in no way suffered from the flames to which it is exposed. We scarcely recognise in her neighbour, as many critics have done, a likeness to Van Dyck. But we entirely agree with M. Max Rooses that Rubens is in this picture greatly indebted to the assistance of one of his pupils, and that the silvery and somewhat cold greys point to Th. van Thulden as the collaborator. A small replica of the painting in the King of Belgium's collection seems to us, on the contrary, wholly by Rubens.

The more sedentary life he was now leading enabled Rubens to accept the numerous commissions for pictures entrusted to him, and once again necessitated recourse to collaborators. They executed the cartoons for a series of tapestries of the *History of Achilles* for Charles I. Rubens himself painted eight sketches for them, which contain several figures already utilised in other works;<sup>1</sup> they cannot be counted among his best works, although they reveal his decorative powers. He showed his strength more completely in the large canvases painted for the Henry IV. gallery. We have seen how greatly this work interested him. He had long ardently solicited the ever-delayed commission. We find a passage referring to the matter in a letter, from Antwerp, to Dupuy, dated January 27, 1628. "I have begun the sketches for the other gallery, which, thanks to the quality of the subjects, will be, in my opinion, more magnificent

<sup>1</sup> The sketches are mentioned in the inventory made after the death of Daniel Fourment, Helena's father.

than the first, so that I hope to show progress rather than any falling off. If God only grants me health and life to finish the work successfully! May He also grant the Queen-mother a long enjoyment of her *Palais dor!*" But Rubens was interrupted by the diplomatic missions that kept him either in Spain or England from August, 1628, to March, 1630. Richelieu had never looked on the artist with favour, and his prolonged absence gave the Cardinal an opportunity of begging Marie de' Medici to entrust the execution of the pictures for this gallery to an Italian. "Madam," he wrote, on April 22, 1629, "I thought your Majesty might not object if I suggested that it would be fitting to entrust the painting of the gallery of your palace to Giuseppino d'Arpino, who is desirous of the honour of serving you, and of undertaking and completing the work for the price received by Rubens for the other gallery."



THE HOLY FAMILY WITH THE APPLE-TREE.

(Vienna Gallery.)

The Queen-mother, hearing nothing of Rubens, began to yield to these overtures, and asked Cardinal Spada to what painter she might entrust the work, and if Guido Reni, who then held a prominent position, would consent to undertake it. The Cardinal replied that Reni was unable to leave Bologna, that Giuseppino was too old to go to Paris, but that Guercino

would supply their place ; whereupon Marie de' Medici decided not to withdraw the commission from Rubens. But he was not at the end of his troubles. About October or November, 1630, while acknowledging to Dupuy<sup>1</sup> the obligations he was under to the Abbé de St. Ambroise ("for had it not been for his kindness, he would have made up his mind to lose his fortune in France, without thinking any more of the work for the Queen-mother,") he regretted the misunderstandings that had arisen regarding the dimensions of the pictures. He had, however, followed the directions given him by the Abbé at all points, "and had worked entirely according to his orders, some of the largest and most important of the pictures, such as the *Triumph of the King*, for the bottom of the gallery, being in an advanced stage," when the measurements were changed by reducing the height two feet, and piercing the walls here and there with doors. "He was therefore compelled to maim, spoil, and alter everything that he had completed. . . . He had complained to the Abbé himself, and had entreated him to allow him half a foot more, so that he need not behead the king seated in his triumphal car, and had also shown him the inconvenience of the addition of the before-mentioned doors. . . . I said plainly and not without irritation," he added, "that so many vexations at the beginning of the work seemed to be a bad omen for its ultimate success ; to speak the truth, I am discouraged and disgusted by these new plans and changes ; they are prejudicial to me and to the work, the grandeur and brilliance of which will be greatly lessened if its size has to be diminished. If they had been so ordered at the first I could have made a virtue of necessity ; nevertheless, I am ready to do everything that is possible to be agreeable to, and to serve, the Abbé, and I beg you to do what you can for me."

But greater annoyance still was in store for Rubens ; this unfortunate work, delayed on account of the error in the measurements, was never to be finished. In commenting on the fragments that have been preserved, we shall attempt to reconstruct the whole. In all

<sup>1</sup> As we said, this letter, contrary to Rubens's usual custom, was written in French, so that it might be communicated "*in case of need*," to M. de St. Ambroise.



could apply any other... (The text is extremely faint and largely illegible, appearing to be a letter or report.)

*Child in Leading Strings.*

(Study in Three Chalks.)

(THE LOUVRE.)

The text continues with a detailed study or critique of a painting, likely 'The Child in Leading Strings' by Jean-François de Troy. The text is very faint and difficult to read, but appears to discuss the composition and execution of the work.

The study concludes with a final assessment of the work, mentioning the Louvre and the artist's technique. The text is very faint and difficult to read, but appears to be a formal report or critique.



Portrait of the Virgin Mary





probability the Henry IV. gallery would have corresponded with the Medici gallery, and would have comprised twenty-four pictures, including the six portraits of Henry IV. and his family. Only seven of the eighteen remaining pictures have come down to us, among them the two large companion pictures of the same size as those painted for the Queen-mother: the *Battle of Ivry* and the *Triumphant Entry of Henry IV. into Paris*, both in the Uffizi; the small sketch for the third, the *Taking of Paris*, is in the Berlin Museum. Of the other sketches extant, three are in the Wallace Collection: the *Birth of Henry IV.*, the *Marriage of Marie de' Medici to Henry IV.*, and the *Triumphant Entry into Paris*, of which the Earl of Darnley has a variant at Cobham Hall, more like the actual picture; three are in the Liechtenstein Gallery: the *Battle of Coutras*, *Henry IV. availing himself of the Opportunity to make Peace*, and a third, the subject of which is ambiguous; somewhat modifying its elements, Rubens derived from it a fairly important and very notable picture recently purchased by Herr Miehtke of Vienna. Lastly, M. Léon Bonnat has a sketch of the *Battle of Ivry*. To complete the information we have collected on this subject we may state that the following note occurs in the catalogue of the sale held at Rubens's death: *Six large unfinished pictures, containing sieges of towns, battles and triumphs of Henry IV., King of France, which were begun some years ago for the gallery of the Luxembourg Palace belonging to the Queen-Mother of France.* The two large Uffizi pictures were doubtless among these. Judging by their dimensions (14 feet by 10 feet 10½ inches), perhaps two other of these *unfinished pictures* figure in the catalogue of the Fraula sale at Brussels in 1738, although they are there attributed to Van Dyck and Snyders. They are: No. 424: *Henry IV. besieging Paris*, where spies bring news that the Spaniards are helping the inhabitants; and No. 425: *Henry IV. at the Battle of Constans (sic)*, with more than a thousand figures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These two pictures were not sold, and all trace of them is lost. It would be interesting to know what has become of them, and also of a sketch in the Burtin sale (1819), *Henry IV. receiving the Sceptre from the Hands of his People*, which apparently belonged to this series.

The sketches, although less finished than those for the Medici gallery, are dashed off with greater freedom and animation. Given clearer and better defined situations, Rubens dared to abandon himself to his genius. Those belonging to Prince Liechtenstein are extremely original in conception. Allegorical personages fill the lower part and serve to characterise the subjects ; these are enframed by Cupids and



THE LAST SUPPER.  
(The Brera.)

garlands of fruit or flowers, forming medallions on which the figures are smaller.

This fanciful arrangement gave Rubens the opportunity to display his decorative qualities, and seems to have inspired the French painters of the eighteenth century. But unless it was due to the architectural exigencies of the gallery for which the pictures were designed we scarcely believe that the master would have definitely carried it out. It in no way re-

sembles the very simple arrangement of the other extant sketches, and of the pictures of the Medici Gallery.

Although all the sketches are very interesting, the Uffizi pictures are, as works of art, much more valuable and important. Yet the *Battle of Ivry* is scarcely more than a vast sketch in which Rubens was chiefly concerned with the distribution of the masses and values, placing here and there a few dull colours, such as pale yellows and faded reds, in close proximity, on a ground of neutral tones. But its masterly breadth and sense of the pictorial prove to what admirable account the

artist here turned his former works. A two-fold danger besets the painter of battle-pieces. When the action is not carefully regulated, the result is chaos ; when it is restrained, we too often get an impression of coldness little suited to the subject. Rubens placed the decisive action in the centre ; but everywhere the rest of the composition gives the idea of a violent, desperate struggle. Above, Bellona and Victory fly rapidly through the sky. The combatants

crowd round their respective leaders, who advance with threatening mien. But it is clear that the enemy cannot sustain the shock of Henry IV.'s attack. Their ranks are already in confusion ; the impetuosity of their assailants' advance increases and completes their defeat. The horses participate in the general *mêlée* and dash furiously against each other. In this dramatic episode Rubens doubtless remembered the principal group of the *Battle of Anghiari* which he had copied when



ST. THERESA INTERCEDING FOR THE SOULS IN PURGATORY.  
(Antwerp Museum.)

in Italy. We scarcely notice the reminiscence, however, so closely is the group allied to the general action, and so admirably is it welded into the whole. The unity of the composition is perfect, and the artist has produced an extremely dramatic effect without apparent effort.

The *Triumphal Entry of Henry IV. into Paris* has the same qualities of arrangement, but the execution is more finished, and the

inspiration higher, more poetical and individual. Before Rubens, many artists had celebrated the splendour of a great conqueror's triumph. Without mentioning the numerous antique bas-reliefs that he saw at Rome, we know that Rubens copied several fragments of Mantegna's *Triumph of Cæsar* in London; but in treating a subject so well suited to his taste, he borrowed nothing from his predecessors. Free to interpret it as he pleased, he drew from it one of his most brilliant masterpieces. Henry IV., standing on a chariot drawn by white horses, advances, dominating the crowd, and seemingly deaf to its acclamations. A horseman precedes him carrying a flag; warriors, laden with arms and standards captured from the enemy, are grouped at the sides; others make the air resound with the fanfares of their trumpets, and at the back, chained captives are led with difficulty through the crowd of women and children come to do honour to the hero. All the attributes, all the splendours of triumph are brought together and most movingly expressed. The arrangement of the extremely animated silhouette is imposing and well-balanced. In this well-filled composition there are none of the commonplace or unchastened figures which sometimes spoil the best of the master's productions. Both types and attitudes are noble and expressive. Note the genius who, flying in the sky, holds a crown above the victor's head; or the beautiful creature who guides the horses with so proud a mien; note the quivering horses themselves, with their elegant forms, their delicate heads, their gleaming eyes; admire the King, superb in his calm dignity, raising high in the air a laurel branch, symbol of that peace the painter loved, placed in the hero's hand, as if to consecrate in him a glory higher than that of an ordinary conqueror. The colour, although very strong, is full and sober; the artist had learnt more and more to recognise the efficacy of iron-grey tones; these, spread all over the canvas, form a support and a wondrous accompaniment to the few brilliant notes struck here and there in this truly lyric work, one of the most original and most entirely beautiful the master ever produced. But in spite of their merit the two canvases, the only examples of this important work that have come down to us,

are hung in the Uffizi under the most deplorable conditions. They are half hidden by the wretched statues of the Niobides, which make it impossible to see them as a whole; the varnish has disappeared from their surface, they are badly stretched, and covered with long-accumulated dust. Such a state of things speaks volumes for the indifference and lack of curiosity of those who, instead of carefully studying such masterpieces, neglect them in this way to the great scandal of all true lovers of art.

While Rubens was waiting for information from the Abbé de St. Ambroise as to the consequences that the changes in the dimensions originally fixed would entail on his work, he suddenly heard that the Queen-mother had been exiled, and was imprisoned at Compiègne. This proceeding had been successfully urged on Louis XIII. by Richelieu after the *Journée des Dupes*. The concluding portion of a letter from Rubens to Peiresc, dated from Antwerp, March 27, 1631, describes the impression made on him by these unexpected events. "The news from France," he said, "is certainly of the highest importance, and God grant that it prove not the greatest of all catastrophes! I am much indebted to the difficulty that has arisen with the Abbé de St. Ambroise relative to the dimensions of the pictures. It has kept me in suspense for more than four months, during which time I have not touched the work; but it seems that my good genius prevented me from getting on with it. I consider that the trouble I have already taken is lost, because it is to be feared that so exalted a personage has not been captured to be set free again. The former escapade will cause a greater vigilance in the future, so there is little hope of its repetition.<sup>1</sup> In fact, all courts are liable to changes, but that of France more than the rest. At a distance it is difficult to express any decided opinion on such events; I will be silent, rather than censure unjustly." Rubens had no further illusions with regard to the completion of what would certainly have been one of his best works. His good sense showed him that the Queen's exile and withdrawal from affairs were final. Although it cost him much to

<sup>1</sup> Rubens probably alludes to the flight from Blois.

relinquish a work of which he felt the beauty, and in which, as he told Peiresc, he thought he showed "progress," he uttered no complaint, and, to avoid recrimination, refrained from discussing the circumstances of which he was the victim, for fear of hurting the feelings of his correspondent.

Events, however, were hurrying on, and were to draw Rubens once again into the vortex of politics from which he thought he had escaped for ever. While the Queen-mother was detained at Compiègne, her son, Gaston of Orleans (who was mixed up in all the plots for getting rid of Richelieu), first took refuge in Burgundy, and then with Charles IV., Duke of Lorraine, who had espoused his cause. The two princes conferred together with a view to interesting the Governor of the Low Countries in their quarrel; and as a result, the Marquis d'Aytona, Philip IV.'s ambassador at Brussels, was ordered to broach the matter with their agents; but as D'Aytona was obliged to depart with the army, he suggested that Rubens should take his place. Thinking that he would thereby gain more freedom of action, Gaston advised his mother to escape from Compiègne, and he caused the Princess Isabella to be sounded as to the welcome the fugitive might reckon on if she sought shelter in Flanders. The Infanta temporised, anxious to inform Philip IV., and learn his views of the matter before definitely replying. But Marie de' Medici, without waiting for an answer, escaped from Compiègne on the night of the 18th--19th July, 1631. The Queen had first thought of shutting herself up in the stronghold of La Chapelle, which the governor had promised to deliver into her hands; but learning that she would not be in safety there, she determined to gain the frontier, and travelled for more than twenty leagues without stopping, in order to reach Avesnes. From thence she sent a letter to Louis XIII. explaining her conduct, and despatched one of her officers to Isabella to inform her of her arrival in her country. The princess deputed the Marquis d'Aytona to convey her compliments to the Queen, and to place himself at her service. Among the gentlemen who accompanied her, Marie de' Medici singled out the Marquis de la Vieuville as the most worthy to confer with Isabella's delegate;

D'Aytona on his side chose Rubens, whom he had brought with him, as intermediary between the Queen-mother and Isabella. Rubens's loyalty, his knowledge of the pending negotiations between the different courts of Europe, and the pleasant relations which he had always maintained with Marie de' Medici, justified the choice; thus, in spite of himself, and by force of circumstances, the artist found himself



SKETCH FOR THE BATTLE OF IVRY.  
(M. Léon Bonnat's Collection.)

once more unexpectedly associated with the grave questions raised by the presence of the fugitive in Flanders.

The first days, however, were devoted to fêtes. D'Aytona did not consider that the Queen was sufficiently safe at Avesnes from any sudden attempt that might be made by Richelieu to carry her off; so, on July 29, she set out from that place for Mons in truly regal state. She was received there with all the honours usually paid to reigning sovereigns. Isabella, who came from Marimont to visit her, embraced her with every testimony of respect, and on August 13 took her to Brussels. After a magnificent reception,<sup>1</sup> she was lodged for a few

<sup>1</sup> The details of the reception may be studied in a contemporary narrative: *Histoire curieuse de tout ce qui s'est passé à l'entrée de la Reine-mère dans les Pays-Bas*, by the Sieur de la Serre (Antwerp, Plantin Press, Fol., 1652). Although published a year later than the event, the narrative gives a very good idea of the tumult into which people's minds

days in the palace of the Dukes of Brabant, which had just been entirely restored. But the position was a delicate one; and Isabella, while overwhelming the fallen Queen with honours, acted with due prudence. She could not pledge herself in any way until she received instructions from Madrid. In the meantime Rubens had interviews with Vieuville, with Gaston's emissaries, and with the Queen herself; he tried to discover her plans and those of Gaston, who desired, as she did, to influence Philip IV., if not to take part openly against Lewis XIII., at least to support their partisans in France. The artist wrote a long letter to Olivarès from Mons on August 1, in which he tried to describe the position of affairs, and also to state clearly what he considered the best means of action. He explained first that it was "from pure obedience, by the express command of the Infanta and the Marquis d'Aytona, that he busied himself with the matter. . . . If the Queen-mother has thrown herself into her Serene Highness's arms, she was urged to that course by the violence of Richelieu, who, forgetting that he was her creature, and that she had raised him from the dirt, from the lofty position in which she had placed him, aims the darts of his ingratitude at her." After drawing a contrast between the evils caused by conduct which, like the Cardinal's, is only ruled by personal interest and expediency, and the brilliant advantage that the Spanish monarchy derived from the duke's devotion, Rubens denies that he "believes the accounts given by Richelieu's enemies. But during his mission to England, he had learnt that the Cardinal's perfidy was so well known that he was henceforth incapable of deceiving any one; in his opinion, this was the worst possible policy, for all human intercourse is based on confidence." Rubens again protested his great love of peace; "he would retire from the business if he saw that the Queen-mother or Monsieur sought to provoke a rupture between the two crowns." Both declare that nothing is farther from their intentions, "for if they openly availed themselves of Spanish

were thrown at the sight of a Queen proscribed by the Minister who owed his rise to her. The author addresses her in his preface in the exaggerated tone then in fashion: "You were the only wife of Henry IV., and are still the happy mother of Lewis the Just." It would be difficult to put more errors and blunders into so few words.





XXXIII

*Massacre of the Innocents.*

(MUNICH GALLERY.)



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an 151/100



arms against the Cardinal, who shields himself with the mantle and the person of the King of France, they would become so hateful to the French that their party would be ruined. Monsieur would render himself almost incapable of succeeding to the French crown, to which he was as far from aspiring during the lifetime of his brother, as he was determined to defend himself against the Cardinal. If he took up arms it would be from sheer necessity, because he could not find any security for his mother's life, or his own, in a state of peace. . . ." He had besides in France the support of a powerful party; and Rubens enumerated, somewhat complacently, the means at his disposal. But on that point it was necessary to rely on Gaston's word, for such pledges ought to be kept secret; as long as the course of action is not determined on, no one can declare himself. The hatred aroused by the Cardinal was growing intense, and would increase the number of discontented persons more and more. Then, entering into detail concerning the troops that might be mobilised by Monsieur's supporters, he insisted that the money destined to pay them should be raised as soon as possible; it was necessary to act promptly, for, as the Marquis de Vieuville said:—"If we let the ardour of the French nation cool, without taking advantage of its first heat, time would be given for the Cardinal's machinations," and everything would end in smoke. If such aid were not forthcoming at the right moment, Monsieur would lose credit with his supporters, and would not regain it. "The sum he asked for the moment was so small that it did not seem probable that it could bring about so great a result." "The encouragement and assistance publicly rendered by the French to the Dutch clearly authorised the Spaniards to give them a *quid pro quo*. As to the sum necessary for placing Monsieur in a satisfactory position, it was 300,000 gold crowns, at 12 reale the crown, which did not equal a two months' provision for the Low Countries. England, too, is well disposed towards Monsieur; and if the matter succeeded, it would be desirable to make a general peace at the Cardinal's expense, for he keeps up barren agitations all over the world." Now therefore is the propitious moment "for freeing the generous Spanish nation from a reproach

wrongly imputed to her, a reproach based on the firmly rooted general opinion that she can never decide to take prompt advantage of her opportunities; but that, through interminable deliberations, she too often sends *post bellum auxilium*, a circumstance that does not accord with the prompt resolution that is the duke's virtue."

These extracts, the transcription of which we judge to be warranted by their importance, are in strong contrast with the usual reserve practised by Rubens in his diplomatic despatches. He felt himself here in full agreement with the Marquis d'Aytona, who two days before wrote to Olivarès most urgently, "that in his opinion here was an opportunity such as the duke had never before had to revenge the insults of France; the King had not only sufficient reasons on his own part, but the justice and right of delivering his mother-in-law from the Cardinal's oppression" (Despatch of July 30th). Contrary to Rubens's expectations, the Marquis de Mirabel, Spanish Ambassador at Paris, wrote to Philip IV. in the same sense. But besides the moral support that Rubens derived from this harmony of sentiment with the official representatives of the Spanish Court at Brussels and Paris, many other causes united to make him use this language. His affection for Marie de' Medici, his loyalty, his notions of the respect due to authority, perhaps, also, unconsciously, his personal resentment against Richelieu, who had never appreciated him at his true worth, acted on his mind, and made him wish to see the Cardinal's fall. He considered Richelieu to be the scourge of Europe, and the most ungrateful subject of the Queen-mother, to whom he owed everything. It was this frame of mind that made Rubens accept Monsieur's statements as to the number of supporters on whom he could count in France, and the troops they could put at his disposal, while his prejudices naturally inclined him to diminish the Cardinal's resources and power in an equal degree.

Had the Court of Madrid placed entire confidence in Rubens, and had they adopted his views, very serious embarrassments would have resulted for France; but the decision to be made was an extremely grave one for Spain. Philip IV. wholly approved "of the friendly fashion in which Marie de' Medici was received, served, and treated in

his states"; but he had no intention of overstepping the bounds of prudence. He was ready to assist the Queen as much as possible as far as negotiations went; but he was in no way disposed to take up arms on her behalf. His council, after giving the despatches of D'Aytona and Rubens full consideration, unanimously rejected the proposals contained in them; and the duke, while doing justice to the artist's good



THE VICTORIOUS HERO DRAWN TOWARDS PEACE BY MINERVA.  
(Herr Miethke's Collection, Vienna.)

intentions, regarded his overtures as absolutely inadmissible, characterising them contemptuously as *Italian verbiage*. Philip forwarded his instructions to his aunt, insisting on the scanty confidence to be placed in Monsieur's interested information, and demonstrating, not unreasonably, how foolish it was to irritate the King of France by lending aid to so poorly organised a party as that of the Duke of Orleans. As to the Queen, everything possible should be done, in concert with the other sovereigns of Europe, to bring about her reconciliation with

her son ; but it was necessary to be very careful with promises that pointed to more active aid.

In spite of the failure of his suggestions in favour of armed intervention, Rubens, who had followed Marie de' Medici to Brussels, continued to serve her as intermediary with the Spanish Court. He drew up a plan of reconciliation with her son ; but although approved by Olivarès, it was not submitted to Lewis XIII. as the Marquis de Mirabel judged it useless to make an attempt which Richelieu would certainly oppose. Rubens's part in these affairs gradually became of less importance. He confined himself to giving the duke exact information regarding the actions of the Queen-mother, who, faithful to her love of intrigue, did not consider herself defeated, and was in constant search of some one whom she might interest in her cause. But the Infanta, in consequence of the orders she had received, took care to neutralise any proceedings she considered might compromise the Spanish Court. Outwardly, she continued to pay the Queen the greatest attention, and at the beginning of September accompanied her to Antwerp, where the magistracy gave her a magnificent reception. Triumphal arches, official speeches, the representation of a tragedy at the Jesuit College, nothing was wanting to the fête. On September 10 the two princesses visited the Plantin Press ; Balthasar Moretus, who was then the manager, did the honours of the house, and a complimentary set of impromptu verses composed by him was printed in their presence and offered for their acceptance.

Rubens, as a friend of Moretus, was doubtless of the party. He also received Marie de' Medici in his own splendid house ; and in the character of a faithful narrator, M. de la Serre has told us of the visit in his affected style : "The Queen desired to see all the fine pictures which were in Master Rubens's house. He is a man whose industry, marvellous as it is, is the least of his qualities ; his judgment and intelligence raise him so high above his position that the works due to his prudence are as admirable as those due to his brush. Her Majesty was vastly delighted to contemplate the living marvels of his pictures." The official documents do not record that during her visit to Antwerp



the Queen, already in need of money, borrowed a certain sum from Rubens, some of her jewels being the guarantee. Marie de' Medici also visited Van Dyck, who, then at the zenith of his fame, was on the point of settling in England. She took pleasure in seeing his collection of Titian's pictures and of the copies he had made from that master's works ; she also sat to Van Dyck in his studio, and, according to De la Serre, "he made a finer picture of her than any of the great artists who have ventured to paint her portrait."

Notwithstanding these public demonstrations, Marie de' Medici was forced to recognise that no formal assistance was to be expected from the Spanish Court. Thinking to advance her cause, she sent one of her gentlemen to the Prince of Orange to obtain his support, in view of a truce between Spain and the Low Countries. Informed of the proceeding, Isabella sent Rubens in the greatest secrecy to sound Prince Frederick Henry on the same subject ; but, as before, Baugy, the French Ambassador at the Hague, discovered the mystery, and wrote to Paris, on September 23 : "The painter Rubens has been here, and although his business was kept secret, it has leaked out, and has given much displeasure to those who know what he is about. He was only here from one evening to the next morning,<sup>1</sup> and the discussion lasted only half an hour." M. Max Rooses<sup>2</sup> wisely observes that the choice of Rubens for this mission was most unlucky, for the name of itself was sufficient to call up unpleasant reminiscences in the minds of the Princes of Nassau. But the Infanta, and in all probability the artist as well, were ignorant of the criminal relations between Rubens's father and Anne of Saxony, and were therefore unaware that the choice was inopportune, and that it would recall sad events to the House of Orange.

Recognising the futility of her efforts to interest the Spanish Court in her cause, Marie de' Medici decided to go to Holland to pursue the sterile claims that she put forward later with no better success in England and Germany. Rubens's mission ceased with her departure.

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, he spent two days at the Hague.

<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte der Malerschule Antwerpens*. P. 232.

and at the beginning of April, 1632, he demanded and received permission to return to Antwerp. Writing shortly after (April 12) to Gerbier, he thus expressed his satisfaction: "I have withdrawn here



PORTRAIT OF ELISABETH DE BOURBON, FIRST WIFE OF PHILIP IV.

(The Louvre.)

for a while, and I never regretted any resolution I have taken less." But although the artist had once again found the quiet home-life he loved, he was not yet entirely freed from politics. He was so well known, and his devotion to and influence with the Infanta



DESIGN FOR AN ALTAR OF THE VIRGIN.  
(Albertina Collection.)

were so great, that whenever occasion arose, his assistance was naturally asked. A month had scarcely passed when he had to inform the Infanta of a proposal made to him secretly by a gentleman of the Duke of Bouillon's, offering in the name of his master, and under certain guarantees, which were to be furnished by the Court of Brussels, to deliver the fortress of Sedan to Gaston of Orleans, on condition that he would place there a body of 1200 men before the duke declared in his favour. Nothing, however, came of the proposal, for soon after the Duke of Bouillon took service in the Dutch army.<sup>1</sup>

In spite, then, of his desire for a retired-life, Rubens returned to politics. In 1632 hostilities were energetically resumed by Frederick Henry, with disastrous results for Spain. After gaining possession of Venlo, Ruremonde, and several other towns, the prince laid siege to Maestricht, which he took soon after, and, as the Venetian Ambassador informed his government, "he hoped that very year to kiss her Serene Highness the Infanta's hand at Brussels." The Court of Madrid, which, by its continual tergiversations had so often missed the opportunity of coming to terms with the United Provinces, now found itself obliged to make an attempt at an accommodation under most unfavourable circumstances. The Governor of the Low Countries again thought of Rubens for the conduct of the negotiation. But the demands of the Dutch had increased with their success. The artist returned to Brussels after two futile journeys to Liège, with no other result than that of rousing the jealousy of the foreign ministers resident in Holland. In consequence of the threatening situation, Isabella determined to convoke the States-General of Flanders, a thing that had not been done for thirty years. Directly they assembled, they demanded the Infanta's authorisation to enter into relations with the States-General of Holland, in order to treat directly with them and the Prince of Orange. Their request was granted; ten deputies, presided over by the Archbishop of Mechlin and the Duke of Aerschot,

<sup>1</sup> Henry of Bouillon's second son. Turenne, served his military apprenticeship in the school of his cousin, Prince Frederick Henry of Nassau.



*Portrait of the Marquis of Leganes.*

(ALBERTINA COLLECTION.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie )



Printed by Draeger, Paris.





were appointed by them to negotiate at the Hague with the delegates of the United Provinces. Isabella, somewhat disquieted by the evident leanings of the deputies of the States-General towards independence, commissioned Rubens, under pretext of informing them of preceding negotiations, to act with them with the Prince of Orange, but in a sense more in conformity with her ideas and those of her council. Consequently, on December 13, 1632, the master wrote to the Prince of Orange for a passport, which was delivered to him on December 22. But the Duke of Aerschot, who received information of this step from the Hague, took umbrage at it, and at his suggestion,<sup>1</sup> three members of the States-General were sent to the Infanta to remonstrate with her on Rubens's proposed share in the negotiations. In order to calm them, Isabella was forced to assure them that the mission she had confided to her painter had no other object than to inform the deputation exactly of all the anterior proceedings, and that Rubens would not intervene in the treaty, the conclusion of which was reserved solely for the States-General. Knowing the ill-feeling of the Duke of Aerschot towards him, Rubens did not visit him when he passed through Antwerp, but wrote to him in order to dissipate "the resentment he had shown at his request for a passport, for," he added, "I walk on a firm footing, and beg you to believe that I shall always account satisfactorily for my actions. I affirm before God that I have never had any other commands from my superiors than to serve your Excellency." The letter concluded with polite formulas and assurances of devotion. The Duke of Aerschot replied to this courteous communication in haughty and insulting terms: "he had every right to refuse Rubens the honour of this reply, since he had so notably failed in his duty, by not coming to see him in person, and by presuming to write him a letter only permissible between persons of equal rank, though he knew quite well where and when he could have spoken to him." Then, putting the finishing touch to the insult, the duke ended with these

<sup>1</sup> Gachard. *Histoire politique et diplomatique de P. P. Rubens*, Brussels, 1877, p. 247.

words: "It does not matter to me in the least on what footing you walk, or what account you can give of your actions; all I can tell you is, that I shall be very glad if you will learn for the future how persons of your rank ought to write to those of mine." To aggravate the offence, the duke made it public; he sent copies of his letter to the States-General, and they communicated it to the Infanta and the Marquis d'Aytona, who pacified the artist, and made him promise, out of consideration for them, not to make recriminations. The discussions in favour of peace ended in nothing; the death of the Infanta Isabella, which occurred soon after (December 1, 1633), caused the artist, for a short time at least, to live in retirement. He lost in her a princess to whom he had always given the most unqualified devotion; while, on her side, from the day on which, as quite a young man, he had entered her service, the Governor of Flanders had always showed him the most flattering testimonies of her confidence and goodwill.



STUDY OF A CHILD, SEEN FROM BEHIND.

(The Louvre.)



NYMPHS AND SATYRS.  
(The Prado.)

## CHAPTER VII

FURTHER PORTRAITS OF HELENA FOURMENT—THE "PELISSE"—LEGENDARY SUBJECTS INSPIRED BY HELENA—THE "DEATH OF DIDO"—"ANDROMEDA"—RUBENS'S OPINIONS ON THE IMITATION OF ANTIQUE STATUES—THE "PROGRESS OF SILENUS"—THE "LOVES OF THE CENTAURS"—THE "CROC EN JAMBE"—THE "FEASTS OF THE FLESH"—THE "OFFERING TO VENUS" AND THE "GARDEN OF LOVE."



HELENA FOURMENT.  
Study for the picture in the Hague Gallery.  
(The Hermitage.)

THE repeated absences forced on Rubens by his various diplomatic missions only increased his fondness for the home where his work and his loved companion awaited him. These frequent interruptions made it impossible for him to undertake works that required much time, but he had always at hand a charming model whom he could turn to account in his brief leisure moments. Houbraken, speaking of her beauty, called her a *new Helen*, and said that she was a valuable possession for the artist,

"since she spared him the expense of other models." His portraits of her painted at this period are both numerous and varied. The finest of them are the full length portraits formerly at Blenheim, and

now in the possession of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild.<sup>1</sup> In one, Helena turns three-quarters face to the spectator; she wears a velvet hood in Spanish fashion, and a black satin dress, the slashed sleeves ornamented with lilac ribbons. The bodice is trimmed with lace, and partly reveals the bosom; the figure set off by the architecture of the background is superbly vivid and animated.<sup>2</sup> The young girl is thinner, and seems to have grown taller; her manner is more assured, as befits the dignity of the mistress of her famous husband's house. Thus arrayed, Madame Rubens is about to go out, for we see a carriage harnessed with two impatient horses at the bottom of the steps she is descending. The façade of her fine house is seen in perspective by the side of the colonnade of the staircase, and farther off still is a gabled house; both of these appear in Harrewyn's engraving. Helena is accompanied by a boy dressed in red, holding his hat in his hand. We cannot determine if he is the little page of a similar type we have already seen in a similar costume in the Munich *Walk in the Garden*, or, as M. Max Rooses thinks, one of Rubens's sons. In any case, although the children of the second marriage were somewhat late to arrive, when they came they followed each other in quick succession. The first, a girl, Clara Joanna, was baptised on January 18, 1632, in the church of St. Jacques, already sacred to the artist by so many memories; and, as if to prove the good understanding that still existed between the families of his two wives, her godfather was Jan Brant, Isabella's father, and her godmother Clara Fourment, Helena's mother. Next came Frans Rubens, also baptised at St. Jacques, with the Marquis d'Aytona, Don Francesco de Moncade, and Christina du Parcy as sponsors; then Isabella Helena, baptised on May 3, 1635; and on March 1, 1637, a second son, Peter Paul, to whom Philip Rubens, the artist's nephew, stood godfather.

The other portrait in Baron Alphonse de Rothschild's collection,

<sup>1</sup> They were purchased from the Duke of Marlborough for the respectable sum of £55,000.

<sup>2</sup> The Munich Gallery contains a replica (a bust) of this portrait, by Rubens.

*Rubens and his Wife teaching one of their Children to walk*, was doubtless painted somewhat earlier; it is finer than the other, and is, in our opinion, one of Rubens's masterpieces. Helena is in profile; her bright hair floats loosely over her bare neck, and she wears a black velvet dress that sets off her brilliant complexion. In her left hand is a fan, and with the other she holds that of a delightfully plump pink and white baby. The child, dressed in a holland frock, with a broad blue sash, tries to walk, and, as if proud of its courage, looks up smiling at the young mother. Rubens, standing a little aside, contemplates the scene; he wears a very elegant costume, consisting of a violet cloak thrown over a black doublet slashed with white, black silk breeches and stockings. An expression of sadness seems to overshadow his paternal joy; it is as if he foresaw that his happiness was not to be of long duration. The great artist has grown older, and although only a few years had elapsed since he painted the *Walk in the Garden*, his features are worn, his face thin, and his complexion faded. The difference in age between the husband and wife begins to show itself cruelly, inexorably. Nevertheless, a spirit of calm, of repose, and inward joy presides over this fine work. Everything about the household speaks of cheerfulness, of an easy, comfortable life, of the wealth and distinction proper to persons of importance. Climbing plants twine round the pillars of a portico, with a glimpse of blue sky between; a rose-bush grows against the wall, and among its flowers a red and blue parrot flutters with outspread wings above a basin into which falls the water of a fountain. It is impossible to imagine a more pleasing picture, brighter and more delicately varied colours, broader and more supple execution, a more exquisite feast for the artist's eye, than is offered by this admirable panel, so lovingly brushed in by Rubens in the best days of his glorious maturity.

Side by side with such exemplary testimony to his conjugal happiness, the painter has made us less discreet confidences. The picture in the Vienna Gallery known as the *Pelisse* is one of the most famous. There Helena is represented standing, coming from the bath, half wrapped in the fur-trimmed cloak that gives its name to the

picture, and imperfectly hides her comely nudity. The fair head is turned to the spectator, the countenance exhibits no sign of embarrassment or shame. She has evidently posed as her husband directed: her breasts are pressed together and raised up by her



THE DEATH OF DIDO.  
(M. C. de Beistegni.)

right arm; her small, shapely left hand holds up a fold of the thick pelisse over her belly. The portrait is too exact, for inelegant forms are faithfully copied. The flesh lacks its former firmness, and clear traces of the compression of the bodice on the torso, and of the garters on the legs with their too perceptible knee-pans may be detected. If the type lacks distinction, the painting attracts by its presentation of life and youth. The frank black of the pelisse, the red of the carpet, and the brown of the background set off the brilliance of the flesh-tints, and although the model-

ling is most delicately studied, it has preserved all its freshness. But if the work does honour to the artist, the husband felt that so truthful a portrait ought not to leave the privacy of the studio, and his will directed that it should not be included in the pictures to be sold after his death.

Helena also served as model for a series of compositions destined

to celebrate her beauty. They are in fact merely studies made from her, which Rubens turned to account without much labour, by giving his model the attitudes and gestures appropriate to the subjects he wished to treat, and grouping round her more or less significant accessories. We find

Helena in the *St. Cecilia* of the Berlin Museum, seated with an inspired air at the organ; in the *Bathsheba Bathing* (Dresden Gallery) where King David contemplates her from a distant terrace, just after he has sent her his guilty message; and in the *Chaste Susanna* at Munich who, seen from behind, is surprised at her toilette, her too fleshy roundities displayed to the lustful gaze of the two old men. The personality of the model is very clearly characterised in the two last named pictures, but the painter, as if desirous that there should not be any misconception, grouped round Helena a number of de-



THE PELISSE.  
(Vienna Gallery.)

tails already familiar to us: the pavilion, the basin with the dolphin, and the little spaniel which figure in the *Walk in the Garden*.

Two other pictures of superior merit represent Helena in a still more complete state of nudity. The revelations of the Berlin *Andro-*

*meda* and the *Death of Dido*, which passed not long since into the possession of M. C. de Beistegni at Paris, enlighten us as to the most intimate details of her conformation. As if he felt the impropriety of divulging such exact information, Rubens, as with the *Pelisse*, never consented to part with the canvas which figures in the inventory drawn up after his death. The composition is curious; Dido, before stabbing herself in the breast, has placed the bust of the Trojan hero, who is the cause of her death, in the gilded bed which crowns the funeral pile. The upper part of the young woman's body leaves much to be desired in point of style, but the legs are simpler and purer in drawing than usual. The expression of despair on her face is exactly what might have been expected from the pretty Antwerp girl, who was probably very little versed in the amorous woes of the Queen of Carthage. Helena's emotions at the narrative of such an old-world episode could not have been either deep or lasting. Her eyes, wet with imaginary tears and piteously raised to heaven, the theatrical posture, and the pretty face which both the *Dido* and the *Andromeda* turn to us, prove that such was the case. In the latter, especially, the grief is not convincing. The plump body, the supple, pearly flesh, all the reassuring signs of youth and blooming health protest against the inactivity of the monster, who, face to face with such appetising delights, would have surely hastened to appease his voracity, and would scarcely have left Perseus time to rescue the beautiful captive. The two works, painted about the same time, are almost of equal value as regards brilliancy of colour. The art is such that nothing reminds us of painting. The fresh, pure tints, placed softly on the canvas, are graduated almost imperceptibly into equal values, and the delicate tissue of the colour gives the appearance of positive reality, an appearance rendered more striking and heightened by the warm transparence of the shadows, and by the marvellous contrast between the light blues of the sky, and the rich blues of the sea which set off the whiteness of the nude bodies, painted in a blaze of light.

When Rubens discovered a subject that suited his talent, he could not relinquish it until he had expressed all its variations, and ex-





XXXIV

*Portrait of an Old Scholar.*

(MUNICH GALLERY.)



Cliche Hartstaenßl

Printed by Jen. Goss Paris France



hausted all its beauties. His passion for Helena influenced him to glorify female nudity in a series of varied compositions. Old legends offered him an inexhaustible mine of subjects that had already been often treated in art, but to which the originality of his conceptions gave fresh life. He was the more drawn to such subjects by the freedom of interpretation they permitted, and by the memories they evoked of the writers or artists who have handed them down to us in the poetic form. They also furnished him with the opportunity, at that time somewhat rare, of painting the human body, and of utilising his knowledge of classical antiquity. In his youth he had learned what was then known of the art of the ancients by studying the bas-reliefs, pictures, or cameos that were to be found in the Gonzaga collections at Mantua, and in those of numerous noble amateurs at Rome. Notwithstanding the extremely modest sums that he could spare from his earnings, he bought whenever he could, busts, medals, and engraved stones, treasures which made the fame of the collection purchased from him by the Duke of Buckingham in 1627. He afterwards did his best to fill up the void thus left in his house, and by 1635 his new collection was of sufficient importance for strangers passing through Antwerp to visit it. When on his travels, he went to see amateurs and dealers, and we know that he directed agents in Italy and Germany to inform him of any work of art that might suit him. We have also seen the place occupied by archæology in his correspondence with his French friends, Peiresc, the brothers Dupuy, and De Thou. So wide was his knowledge that his letters might be those of a professional scholar. His art gave Rubens a superiority over his correspondents. The forms of antique works were deeply graven on his mind by the numerous drawings he made of them; he was thus better able to compare them, and to perceive their likenesses and unlikenesses to each other.

But it was no mere abstract study for him. Examining these different works, and collecting, as he did, copies of the original monuments, the master sought to penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of the life of the ancients, and to reconstruct representations of it as exact as possible. Yet valuable archæological knowledge

did not paralyse the creative faculties of an artist who cared for life and movement above everything. With him, the sense of the picturesque balanced or even outweighed the critical spirit. He has himself left us the categorical expression of his opinions on the subject in a brief treatise on *The Imitation of Statues*<sup>1</sup> of which some passages deserve



BATHSHEBA.  
(Dresden Gallery.)

to be quoted. "There are," he says, "painters for whom such imitation is very useful; others, for whom it is so dangerous that it may almost annihilate art in them. In my opinion, in order to reach supreme perfection, it is necessary not only to become familiar with the statues, but to be steeped in their innermost meaning. Yet such knowledge must be used with prudence, and with entire detachment from the work; for many unskilled artists, and even some of talent, do not distinguish matter from form, nor the figure from the substance

which ruled the sculptor's work." As a painter, Rubens very rightly insisted on the conditions proper to each of the two arts, and on the confusion very often made between them. Many painters, content to imitate statues, produce inert works, and transport cold hard figures

<sup>1</sup> We owe the copy of the Latin text of this work, the original of which is lost, to De Piles. He gives a French translation of it in his *Cours de Peinture par Principes*, Paris, 1708, p. 139.

with extravagant modelling, harsh lights, and opaque shadows, into their compositions, instead of images of life. The study of sculpture is only of advantage to the painter who recognises these distinctions; but when he does so, it offers him incomparable resources, for it helps him to understand the beauty and choice of forms it pre-supposes. The ancients had healthy bodies, developed by athletic exercises invented to give them all the strength and suppleness of which they were capable, always



SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS.

(Munich Gallery.)

before their eyes. In our society as now organised, people think only of eating and drinking, and take no care to exercise their bodies. Thence their heavy, prominent bellies, their weak legs, and nerveless arms. "But the ancients took violent exercise every day in the palestra and gymnasium, till they not only perspired, but were utterly tired out; such training ensured a natural freedom, grace, and harmony in all their movements."

Rubens's advice and criticism comprise not only painting, but the education that, according to one of his favourite maxims, was needed

to make men perfect, an education that ensured both intellectual and physical health : *Mens sana in corpore sano*. He determined the special conditions of painting and sculpture with perfect clearness and moderation ; when he dealt with antique subjects, while taking into account better than any other writer the condition of archæological knowledge in his time, he endeavoured above all to reproduce its living aspects, those which struck the ancients themselves. They personified the beauties or forces of nature in human types in order to express the supreme energies of life or passion, and Rubens sought the significant elements of the legends that attracted his brush in nature itself as their true source. If he found the assistance he needed for the expression of his idea in the realities which surrounded him, he soon went beyond the realities by which he was inspired in order to abandon himself without restraint to the overflowing poetry within him. As he read, his vivid fancy showed him the episodes related by his favourite poets, Ovid and Virgil, transformed and animated by the powerful inspiration of his genius. By the side of the compositions these poets suggested to him, he imagined new ones derived from them, and around each of the types of strength or grace created by antiquity, he grouped the actions in which they were concerned, and pushed the vehemence of the emotions they represented to the uttermost limits. Just as the musician who has found a rich motive does not leave it until he has in due progression given it all the developments of which it admits, so the master never rested until he had exhausted all the combinations to which the poetic legends that attracted him lent themselves. The subjects with which they provided him in the earlier part of his career were mostly calm and cold, and were treated without enthusiasm or conviction. It was the period of trite or subtle allegories, characterised by conventional attributes introduced needlessly, sometimes even improperly, into the scenes. If he represented Bacchus, the god was weighed down by obesity, or stupified with wine ; a motionless Venus occupied herself with her toilette, or shivered beside a Cupid as frigid as herself (Antwerp Museum) ; Diana, weary with the chase, slept with her nymphs amid the heaped-up game minutely painted



by Brueghel (Munich Gallery). When we contemplate these trivial figures, we feel their lack of nobility of form and of beauty, and, without evoking the radiant figures of Greek art, the works of the Renaissance masters rise before our eyes, to warrant our condemnation of these massive Flemish women and the soft opulence of their flesh. But in course of time Rubens's execution became more animated, more alert; his compositions gained in breadth and freedom; he learned how to make his personages live, to group them in common action. The animation with which he endowed them, the decorative intention of the episodes in which they play a part, the picturesqueness of the scene in which they figure, above all, the inimitable brilliance of the colour, more than compensate for their lack of style. Diana now bounds eager and light-footed at the head of her nymphs in rapid pursuit of a stag (Berlin Museum), and the swiftness, sureness, and inspiration of the touch, the fresh vivacity of the tones, create the scene anew, and transform it.

If Rubens had more than once painted lascivious satyrs who looked with eager eyes at the young beauties as they passed, the goddess's presence had restrained the impetuosity of their desires. But in a long frieze in the Prado, Rubens represented Diana's *Nymphs surprised by Satyrs* in her absence. Trusting to the solitude of the spot, the young girls, wearied with hunting, have imprudently fallen asleep beside the animals they had killed, under the protection of their dogs. But the satyrs, who dwelt here in the depths of the forest, inflamed with animal desire at the sight of their naked bodies, rushed upon them. The huntresses, now the hunted, are terrified, and try to avoid the embraces of the cloven-footed brutes. One of them, held back by the hem of her skirt, vainly tries to flee; another, an arrow in her hand, prepares to let it fly; but already three of their companions have been seized round the waist by the monsters, eager for their prey. The irregular silhouette harmonises with the furious emotion of this sudden struggle, and the tawny flesh of the ravishers, the brownish olive-green of the trees and ground, the neutral blues of a sky scarcely brightened by a few pale gleams, throw into

marvellous relief the youthful whiteness of the nymphs, in the centre of whom, well in view, is the figure of Helena Fourment, her arms upraised, with the attitude and tearful countenance of the Berlin *Andromeda*.

The *Progress of Silenus* was also one of Rubens's favourite



THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN.  
(Altarpiece in Antwerp Cathedral.)

subjects. Besides the numerous copies made by his pupils, he painted it himself more than once: there is an early example in the Hermitage, painted in 1615 for the Infanta; another was painted about 1620 (Berlin Museum); in this he represented Isabella, his first wife, and her two children in Silenus's cortege; a third, a more important work painted seven or eight years later (National Gallery), formed part of the Duc de Richelieu's collection, and was commissioned from the painter by an amateur of the time, named Van Uffelen. But in our opinion the Munich

Gallery possesses the best example of this episode so dear to Rubens: he kept the picture in his studio until his death. At first it contained only the half-length figure of Silenus and the personages near him, as in the picture painted for the Infanta. The master afterwards completed it, desirous of giving it all the development it seemed to deserve. He added strips of a different sort of wood

to the panel on either side and at the bottom, the traces of which are easily seen now. The cynical triviality of some of the details is in harmony with the subject, and proves that Rubens was inspired by the "Kermesses" of Flanders, rather than by memories of antique art for this representation of a bacchic festival. It contains figures of repulsive coarseness, such as that of Silenus himself, with his thickset form, overwhelming masses of fat, and expression of dull



THE RETURN FROM THE CHASE.  
(Dresden Gallery.)

bestiality; still more repellent, perhaps, is that of the female faun at his feet, with her flabby flesh, and besotted features. But notwithstanding such vulgarities, the execution is truly enchanting. We may admire the two baby fauns in the foreground, so plump and round, their supple little bodies gorged with milk, their joyful mien, their budding beards and horns. The portly peasant blowing his rustic flute, the negro and the charming young woman near him, the heads of the old man and woman cut by the frame, the quivering tiger

eager to taste the grapes Silenus holds, are equally wonderful as regards the charm and firmness of the painting. The exquisite distinction of the handling is in strange contrast with the baseness of the subject. Looked at from a distance, the superb animation of the brush, the wealth of the palette, the happy use of the neutral greys that make the bold but discreetly distributed colours vibrate, form a whole both strong and delicate in manner: it is one of the boldest and most brilliant pictures the great artist has left us.

Among the subjects of the same order inspired by mythology must be mentioned that curious picture: the *Loves of the Centaurs*. After forming part of the Duke of Hamilton's collection, it passed into the possession of Lord Rosebery. In this work boldness does not exclude taste, and Rubens represents two pairs of amorous centaurs under tall trees in an open country suited to their adventurous journeyings. The two in the foreground, clasping each other, exchange caresses, while a little to the side, the other female centaur coquettishly evades the embraces of her savage lover. Possibly some engraved gem provided the painter with the motive of the composition, for in spite of the Rubens-like character of the arrangement of the group, it has the elegant conciseness of form and the happy rhythm of line that are the hall-marks of classical art. But the savage poetry of the scene as he conceived it, is the master's own. There was nothing like it till two centuries later, when a profound love of external nature and a penetrating sense of the antique, inspired Maurice de Guérin in the beautiful pages of *La Centaure*.

But Rubens did not always need to turn to these hybrid creatures in whom the ancients personified the union of animal and human nature; he had not far to seek for models in order to portray mythological subjects in a more familiar manner. He painted Helena Fourment and himself in the picture *Love and Wine* bequeathed by the Duchess de Galliera to the Municipal Museum of Genoa. The likeness is not exact, but we recognised the couple at the first



*Hercules Destroying the Hydra of Lerna.*

(Fac-simile of an Engraving by Ch. Jegher. After Rubens.)



Printed by Draeger, Paris.





glance. The work, in any case, belongs to the artist's full maturity, judging merely by the character of the execution. It represents a soldier in a cuirass, wearing a scarlet cloak and red breeches, exposed to the double temptation of love and wine. He holds a young woman in a very low bodice, the greenish colour of which harmonises beautifully with the purplish tint of her skirt, on his knee; Bacchus, with ivy-crowned head, stands on the left, lifting on high a cup filled with wine, while Cupid unbuckles the warrior's sword, and pushes him towards his companion. By way of apologue, Envy, habited as an old woman, shakes a lighted torch behind them. Treated as a sketch, the painting is broad and vigorous; the weatherbeaten trooper's head, the girl's bold expression, her white arm and hands, are very rapidly sketched in, but their handling is easy and attractive.

Although Rubens did not represent himself in a still more risky scene, the *Shepherd and Shepherdess in a Landscape* (*Le Croc en Jambe*) of the Munich Gallery, he certainly painted Helena there, struggling with a sturdy boor, who, inflamed with desire, rushes upon her. The young woman, scantily clothed in a red dress that reveals her breast and legs, makes no great effort to repulse her assailant. Eying him askance, she seems slightly astonished, and yet not greatly disturbed at the situation. If the painter is to be congratulated on the animation with which he has so cavalierly dashed off this dangerous scene, we cannot refrain from asking how a husband, so much in love as he was, could depict his wife in such an ugly posture. We must hasten to add that it was one of his last works, and that as long as he lived he kept it in his studio. After his death it was bought for Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, for 800 florins paid to the master's heirs.

Rubens, who did nothing by halves, went even further along this dangerous road. He continued this series of subjects, adding to the breadth of the scene and the number of the figures. Before his time, painters had been tempted by the *Feasts of Flesh*, because this class of subjects offered varied and picturesque resources. To

go back to antiquity, Philostratus described a picture of this kind, but we do not know if he had one before his eyes or if he imagined it. We have seen how Rubens, during his visit to Rome, delighted in copying similar compositions by Titian, his favourite master. In determining to paint an *Offering to Venus* in his turn, when in the full maturity of his genius, he may have recalled the work of his famous predecessor in certain details, but his picture was independently conceived, and both



SHEPHERD AND SHEPHERDESS IN A LANDSCAPE.  
(Munich Gallery.)

by its qualities and its defects is his alone. The multiplicity of little Cupids introduced by the master of Cadore into the Prado picture may be excessive, but the unity is nevertheless perfect. These little figures are still more numerous in Rubens's *Offering to Venus*, which is in the Vienna Gallery, and the composition is divided into two insufficiently connected parts. On one side the dances and games of the *Amorretti*, who frolic round the

goddess, fill two-thirds of the canvas, while the remaining third is occupied by three pairs of dancers, unconnected with the central episode either by the arrangement of the groups or the dimensions of the figures. A vertical line at the point of separation would make two pictures of the canvas. But after acknowledging this very real defect, many details call for admiration. For example, the beautiful girl in the centre who, with a superb gesture, gracefully hands Venus a mirror in order that she may contemplate her beauty; two women on the right

dressed in black, who hold by the hand two pretty children, whom they intend to consecrate to the goddess; then the evolutions and dances of the little Cupids laden with flowers and fruit, who embrace each other and gambol joyously at the foot of the altar. The left side is perhaps even finer, with the elegant figures of nymphs, whose supple bodies bend and curve, excited by the wanton dance. Their cavaliers, two vigorous men and a satyr, drunk with sensuality, hold them in a close embrace; their arms are about their waists, they seek



THE OFFERING TO VENUS.  
(Vienna Gallery.)

their rosy lips, their hands stray over their bodies, and Helena, always Helena, smiling and languid, lifted up by the satyr, who presses her, palpitating, against his tawny breast, half turns her pretty head towards the spectator. Nature herself seems to share in the festival: the blue sky is sprinkled with flakes of silver, and a spring breaks into cascades under a rock, on the summit of which is a temple with white colonnades. Troops of Cupids come to drink of its waters, and near by are trees, the shade of which invites lovers' meetings. Wherever we look we see attractive images, charming forms, pearly tones—silver-grey, pale pink, fresh green, with opal-

escent transparencies, made to give pleasure to the eyes. The old painter shows the measure of his genius better than ever before in this joyous hymn of love sung in honour of his young wife. His talent was never more masterly, bold, or delicate, than in these dreams of pleasure evolved from his imagination. The richness of his nature does not prevent our astonishment at the curious versatility of his complex mind, capable of such strange combinations. How could the sincere Catholic and the painter who indulged in such bold audacities co-exist? How could this man each morning, after hearing mass, calmly take up his brushes and paint these licentious and feverish images with a firm, sure hand?

Several pictures in the same style that now call for our notice must not be regarded as a series of indecent crudities, but as new acceptations of picturesque motives which attracted Rubens, to which he gave all possible developments. Great as was the license which mythological legend authorised, Rubens found himself able to express such freedom of conduct with more apparent propriety in a fanciful subject that allowed the combination of reality with fiction. The subject of the *Garden of Love* was not new; it had not only tempted the Renaissance painters, but the Provençal troubadours, Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, and the ultra-refined courts of Mantua, Urbino, and Ferrara had, in turn, celebrated the theme in prose or verse, or even put it into action. Rubens sought to express aspects of it hitherto untouched, by applying it to his own epoch. It greatly attracted him, and he spent some time in making studies for it. The Fodor Museum at Amsterdam, the Staedel Institute at Frankfort, and the Louvre possess seven drawings of superb breadth, made by him for this picture, from the young ladies and elegant cavaliers with whom he came in contact. He used these studies in several compositions, the moderate dimensions and charm of which ensured them a great success; numerous variants or copies of this picture were painted in the artist's lifetime, several even in his studio and with his collaboration. The most notable of these replicas are assuredly that in the Dresden Gallery (3 ft. 61 in. by 4 ft. 03 in.) and that purchased by Baron Edmond de Rothschild from the

Duke of Pastrana. The latter, painted on wood like the Dresden example, is of rather larger dimensions (4 ft. 1'21 in. by 5 ft. 7'32 in.), and is a work of marvellous skill and delicacy. Yet we must admit that, notwithstanding the legitimate admiration it inspires, in our opinion it has been merely re-touched by Rubens here and there; the extreme finish of the execution denotes the skill of a conscientious copyist rather than the decision and will of a creator. Long before this period Rubens's touch—even in his most carefully finished easel pictures, such as the *Battle of the Amazons* or the *Adam and Eve* of the Hague Gallery—possessed a sureness and decision that have nothing in common with the careful style and patient virtuosity that reveal a copyist's hand. But we can only put forward hypotheses as to the pupil or collaborator who would at that time have been capable of such a work. Van Thulden, Cornelis Schut, and Ab. Diepenbeck were certainly then at Antwerp, but we believe that they only assisted Rubens in large works. Perhaps we should attribute it to less famous pupils, to Fr. Wouters, to Panneels, or perhaps Jacob Meermans. No authentic picture by Meermans is known, but he was so intimate a friend of Rubens, that he appointed him in his will, with two other colleagues, to superintend the sale of the works of art found in his studio after his death.

However this may be, the only entirely original example of the *Garden of Love* is, in our opinion, that of the Prado. It is painted on canvas and is rather larger than the other (6 feet 5'95 inches by 9 feet 3'4 inches), though the figures are fewer in number. Groups of richly-dressed young lords and ladies sit or lie on the flowery turf near a portico adorned with statues in a thickly-wooded park. It is a warm afternoon at the end of summer, for the trees are beginning to put on golden tints; fountains with their sparkling jets of water cool the air agreeably. Near their basins or among the groups a swarm of Cupids gambol, flying round the gallant company. Heedful of their task, ever eager, indiscreet, and restless, they encourage the most enterprising cavaliers in their boldness, or whisper a counsel in the ears of hesitating ladies. More pleasing forms, brighter or gayer



PORTRAIT OF ISABELLA BRANT.

(The Uffizi.)

colours, cannot be imagined. The women mostly wear white, pale blue, light yellow or pink satin dresses, but some have donned black velvet in order to set off their brilliant complexions ; the men wear



PORTRAIT OF HELENA FOURMENT IN SPANISH COSTUME.  
(Baron Alphonse de Rothschild.)

red cloaks and brown or green doublets. It is all variegated, brilliant, luminous, full of freshness, and, looked at from a distance, superb in its coherence, for although it is possible to choose out fragments which, copied by themselves, would be delightful: (the central group, for instance; the cavalier on the right and his pretty companion, or the cavalier towards the left, who puts his arms round a fair-haired beauty, while a roguish Cupid with azure wings unblushingly pushes them towards each other), the work undoubtedly owes its greatness to its general effect and its perfect unity. The picture offers the most perfect expression of the painter's mastery of his art, and is further an epitome of his ideal of grace and beauty. This ideal was doubtless influenced by his early memories of the graceful Court of Mantua, and his recent recollections of the fair women who surrounded Marie de' Medici in Paris. Although his talent and the conditions of his life rendered Rubens to a certain extent cosmopolitan, he remained very Flemish in some ways, as we see by his somewhat massive types, more robust than delicate. We need not seek far to find here many likenesses to Helena Fourment, a likeness now vague, almost instinctive, due to the involuntary homage ever rendered to the object of his passion, now exact, as in the case of the young woman seated in the foreground, who rests her elbow on her gallant's knee and listens with complacent ear to his loving words.

In fact, the picture is Flemish; the master's Dutch colleagues did not represent the subject of elegant and unrestrained voluptuousness in similar fashion at this same period. Frans Hals, Ducq, Palamedes, were rougher, more realistic, less particular in the choice of their subjects; they painted more cynical scenes in the guard-rooms and places of ill-repute they frequented and faithfully reproduced for our benefit. A century later these amorous pastimes, *Elegant Conversations* as they were then called, found more delicate and refined delineators in France in Watteau and his imitators, Lancret and Pater. Watteau was, it is well known, a great admirer of Rubens; but although he sometimes copied his works, and was to a large extent inspired by him





XXXV

*Chariot of Callo.*

(ANTWERP MUSEUM.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)



Cliché Braun Clément et C<sup>ie</sup>

Printed by Gény, Gros, Paris. (France)



he preserved the same independence in treating similar subjects as Rubens had shown with regard to his predecessors. The painter of Valenciennes was wholly original and entirely French; his *Fêtes Galantes* and his *Embarkation for Cytheræa* display subtler elegances with more fancy. His is an artificial and purely imaginary world. Idle and useless, his delicate, nervous, fine gentlemen in their well-fitting satin garments never existed. With their piquant ease of manner, they excel in airy pirouetting, in touching the strings of a guitar, in making love to the sprightly, graceful, exquisitely-dressed creatures who reciprocate their advances. The days pass in endless lounging, in pretty posturings, calculated to show off a beautiful hand or to enhance the play of a fan; in casting killing glances, in arranging the folds of a sheeny gown, in turning the head to display a well-dressed chignon over a tempting neck, or the delicate suppleness of a finely-curved figure. We are in the land of dreams and all the personages are merely players. But Rubens never left the solid earth; what he had to say he said roundly with virile candour, with emphasis sufficient to make himself understood, but not pronounced enough to degenerate into coarseness.

The fate of the *Garden of Love* was strange enough. Painted in the artist's last years, the picture remained in his possession until his death, and was then bought in by Helena. It was later purchased for Philip IV., and so greatly pleased the morose sovereign that he had it placed in his bed-chamber. We learn from the inventories of the Royal Palace, in which it is mentioned under the name of *A Ball (Un Sarao)*, that two *Holy Families* by Raphael, and several other religious pictures by Leonardo, Palma Vecchio and Andrea del Sarto were in the same room. These sacred subjects formed a strange contrast to the *Garden of Love*, and testify to the incoherent ideas of a king who combined habits of gallantry with the austere practices of piety. As M. Cruzada Villaamil naïvely observes: "The picture was not of a kind to be placed by the bedside. However great the religious fervour of him who reposed on the couch, if his glance rested on such a subject, he could not fail to be struck by the ardent ex-

pression of the figures in this priceless work, one which could scarcely aid him to triumph over the weaknesses of the flesh." We shall see later that *His Most Catholic Majesty* always remained faithful to his marked predilection for subjects of this kind in the numerous commissions with which he entrusted Rubens.



JUPITER ENTHRONED ON CLOUDS.

(Liechtenstein Gallery.)



THE SUPPER OF THE GODS.  
(Heseltine Collection.)

## CHAPTER VIII

WORK AND DOMESTIC LIFE—PICTURES PAINTED AT THIS PERIOD—"THE ASCENT OF CALVARY"—"ST. FRANCIS PROTECTING THE WORLD"—THE "MARTYRDOM OF ST. LIÉVIN"—THE "MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS"—VERSATILITY OF RUBENS'S TALENT—VARIETY OF HIS SUBJECTS—"PLENTY"—"THOMYRIS AND CYRUS"—THE "RAPE OF THE SABINES"—"RUDOLPH OF HAPSBURG AND THE PRIEST"—PORTRAITS—RENEWAL OF CORRESPONDENCE WITH PEIRESC (1635).

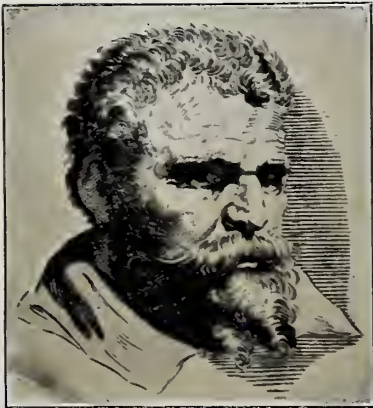


PLATE FROM THE DRAWING-BOOK, ENGRAVED  
BY P. PONTIUS.

RUBENS'S beloved companion continued to be the constant object of his preoccupations, and the chief inspirer of his works. He never tired of dressing her in the richest and most varied costumes, in those that seemed to him best calculated to display her beauty. In placing his establishment on a more expensive footing, he was only adopting a style of living suitable to his position, the rank he held at Antwerp through his fame as a painter,

his office of secretary of the privy council, and his large fortune. But his passion for Helena never made him swerve from the equity that

always ruled his conduct. In the year following his marriage, he made a will with his wife's approval, certified by the notary, T. Guyot, in which advantages in accordance with their position were mutually assured to either survivor, and in which Rubens also scrupulously guarded the rights of the two sons of his first marriage. His affection for them never wavered, whatever his preoccupations, a fact proved by the letter to Gevaert from Madrid, in which he discussed their education with much solicitude. Albert, the eldest, was a gentle, industrious boy, who had an aptitude for classical studies, and showed, like his father, a marked taste for archæology. Rubens had profited so greatly by his visit to Italy, that he wished to procure for his son the benefit of that pilgrimage beyond the Alps which was then regarded as the natural complement of a gentleman's education. Perhaps, also, the presence of this son, two months older than Helena, made him feel some awkwardness in the expression of his passionate feeling for his young wife, and emphasised the disparity of his marriage. Whether this were so or not, the artist possessed in Italy and in the countries through which it was necessary to pass to reach it numerous friends to whom he could introduce the young traveller. He did not hesitate to recommend him to Peiresc, sure in advance of the welcome he would receive, and of the advantages his son would derive from the society of so learned and delightful a man. But either from shyness or some other cause, Albert did not pay the visit that had been arranged, "although he passed close to my house," as Peiresc wrote later to Dupuy, making excuses for the young man's lack of courtesy with his usual kindness.

Enjoying a respite from politics, Rubens set industriously to work. Commissions for pictures, which had somewhat slackened during his absences, now flowed in freely. He was by far the most famous of the Antwerp artists; Van Dyck who, without ever attaining the same celebrity, could alone have rivalled him, had been settled in England since the end of March, 1632, and only paid short visits to his native land. He always preserved affectionate relations with his old master, who, for his part, lost no opportunity of demonstrating his high opinion



of Van Dyck's talent. The rest of the painters were under obligations to Rubens; forced to recognise his indisputable superiority, it was to their interest to obtain his good-will, the happy influence of which they knew so well.

Paintings intended for the decoration of churches formed, as usual, the most important part of the works then commissioned from the master. The greater number possess the animation and the brilliant colour of the *Feasts of the Flesh* painted at the same period. The episode of the *Ascent of Calvary*, it is true, admitted of the movement which the artist put into it. He received the commission in 1634 for the Abbey of Afflighem for the price of 1,600 florins; we learn, however, from a manuscript chronicle of the monastery that the picture painted "by the noble brush of Rubens, the Apelles of our age," was not placed over the high altar of the church until April 8, 1637. The subject was one well calculated to please both the temperament and the tastes of the painter. Christ, escorted by the populace, among whom are some of the holy women, and urged on by His executioners, falls beneath the weight of the cross as He climbs the steep sides of the hill of Golgotha. Every emotion, the most tender as well as the most brutal, is represented in the noisy, palpitating crowd which surrounds Him. But besides the contrasts due to the character of the subject, the artist has introduced others, entirely unexpected, which seem likely to disconcert the spectator. Expecting sombre tones and mournful harmonies, he sees everywhere gay and pleasing colours. Rosy-cheeked children, fair-haired and fresh-complexioned women, the grey and white cruppers of the horses, which, one behind the other, ascend the rugged path, cuirasses and helmets glittering in the sun, a wine-red standard floating in the bluish sky, form a whole rather joyful than sad, and little in harmony with the pathos of the scene. It somewhat disturbs the spectator who seeks, as Paul Mantz puts it, "a cry of pain in this brilliant work and does not find it." Intentional or not, this complete indifference of surrounding nature involves a contradiction which, if it is only too often in accord with the reality of things, seems scarcely justifiable from the artistic point of view; in any

case, it takes away a picturesque element from the force of the impression, an element of which the master would have taken eloquent advantage. But Rubens's execution was never more marvellous than in this picture, for which Eugène Delacroix, who carefully studied it during a journey in Belgium in 1850, professed enthusiastic admiration. Speaking of the boldness with which it is painted, he wrote: "Rubens often indicates his high lights with white. He generally begins to colour by laying on a thick local half-tint and on that, as I conceive, he places the lights and the dark parts. I noticed this touch in the *Calvary*; the flesh of the two thieves is strongly differentiated, but without apparent effort. It is evident that he models or turns the figure in this local tone of light and shadow before putting in the more vigorous touches. I think that his light pictures, like this and a *St. Benedict* that resembles it,<sup>1</sup> were done in this way."

The same method is revealed in the *St. Francis protecting the World*, of which Delacroix also praises "the extraordinary simplicity of the execution, a very light local tint on the flesh, with more loaded touches for the lights." This large and curious canvas was painted in 1633 for the Church of the Recollets at Ghent; it shows the Virgin and St. Francis combining to oppose Christ, Who, with a somewhat commonplace gesture, prepares to destroy the world, like another *Jupiter tonans*. His mother shows Him the breast that nourished him, and seeks to hold back His arm, while St. Francis covers the terrestrial globe with a fold of his monkish robe as if to guard it from the divine wrath. The display of force and the terrified attitudes seem scarcely warranted by the subject, while such sterile anger is little compatible with the justice of a supremely kind master who, forgetful of his dignity, indulges in unrestrained anger, before growing calm again without apparent motive. But if we accept the episode, how great is the art with which it is expressed! how magnificent are the broad, intelligent handling, and the discreet harmony of the neutral colouring, made up of the Saint's brown costume, the Virgin's violet dress and

<sup>1</sup> We have already mentioned this picture, which is in the King of Belgium's collection, together with the very interesting copy made by Delacroix.

black drapery, the bluish tones of the sky and the landscape background.

About 1635 Rubens painted a *Martyrdom of St. Liévin* for the high altar of the Jesuits' Church at Ghent. It is larger than the *St. Francis*,

and is destined to celebrate the glorious martyrdom of one of their patrons. "The *Calvary* and the *St. Liévin*," Delacroix rightly said, "form the culminating point of Rubens's *maestria*." He bound together with perfect art the two phases of the scene he wished to represent : on one side are the executioners eager for the saint's punishment ; on the other we see the already assured reward of his faith. Although Rubens insists on and complacently details the horror of the dreadful drama, representing one of the executioners with a relentless expression, holding a bloody knife in



THE ASCENT OF CALVARY.  
(Brussels Museum.)

his teeth ; another seizing his victim by the beard, and preparing to brand him with a hot iron ; a third who has just torn out his tongue with pincers, throwing it bleeding to the dogs, goaded to fury by a child—the dominant impression is one of serenity. Already some of the troopers, terrified by the half-opened heavens, seek to escape the punishment which awaits them, and the livid old man, kneeling,

his tortured face illumined with love, seems to taste already the felicities that will be the reward of his heroism. As if to celebrate his triumph, the master has grouped an harmonious assemblage of bright colours round the martyr: reds, and golds, the steel of the armour, the white of a rearing horse, and the soft blues of the sky. Thus expressed, the cruel scene becomes a source of exquisite delight to the spectator.

About 1635 also the great colourist painted the *Massacre of the Innocents* wholly with his own hand, for an Antwerp amateur, Antonio de Tassis, who was formerly alderman of the town, and then canon of the cathedral.<sup>1</sup> The composition, conceived in a decorative manner, is superb in arrangement; it gave Delacroix a happy inspiration for his *Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople*; he borrowed from Pontius's engraving, in which the picture is reversed, not only the portico near which he places his horsemen, but several figures, among them that of the kneeling woman in the foreground. Horrible details abound also in this scene of carnage; Rubens, in his exuberant enthusiasm, seemed to take pleasure in accumulating them. Wherever we look, the unequal struggle of the poor defenceless mothers with the murderers of their children, is depicted with all imaginable accompaniments of cruelty. Some, imploring, vainly try to soften the hearts of the executioners; but most of them, maddened, rush on the assassins with the fury of wild beasts defending their young, in the hope of turning their blows against themselves; they drive the assassins back, bite them, or tear them with their nails. Unconcerned, the murderers pursue their sinister task, stabbing, putting their pretty victims to the sword, or seizing them by the heels to dash them against the walls. If it were not for the figure of the Flemish matron who, placed in the centre of the picture, attracts attention somewhat disastrously by her massive shape, theatrical pose, and commanding expression, the work would be entirely moving. Here again

<sup>1</sup> The *Massacre of the Innocents* was afterwards bought for the Duc de Richelieu's collection, where de Piles saw and described it. Later, it was sold to the Elector of Bavaria; it is now in the Munich Gallery.



*Study for the "Massacre of the Innocents" in the Munich Gallery.*

(THE LOUVRE.)







Rubens has touched the scene of despair with all the splendours of his palette, as if he were representing a *fête*. As in the *Garden of Love*, the pale violet tones of the costumes shade into pink, and those of the soft green stuffs into delicate yellows in the lights. The artist preserves the balance of these fresh tonalities here and there by those rich browns and fine full blacks, of which he had so often proved the efficacy. A pleasing landscape, resembling that of the *Offering to Venus*, shows us grey and pink architecture in gay perspective; and angels, carrying crowns or scattering flowers in a soft blue sky striped with white clouds complete this sheeny and variegated piece of colour.

Even if such contrasts are permissible, the enjoyment of the mind is more complete when there is closer harmony between the character of the subject and the means by which it is expressed. Rubens proved this himself in numerous works, but never more strikingly than in the fine picture of *Plenty*,<sup>1</sup> also painted at this period. The subject is of the simplest: three young women gather apples from the tree, while a Cupid perched among the branches lowers a bough loaded with ripe fruit towards one of them. All around, in baskets or scattered on the ground, are melons, apricots, figs, and grapes, painted by Snyders, with his customary perfection. The graceful elegance of the composition, the happy choice of the tones, the transparency and lightness of the shadows accord perfectly with the subject. Rarely has Rubens attained a sweeter, fuller harmony than in the violet tone of one young girl's dress, and the reds and blues of those of her companions.

The *Thomyris and Cyrus* in the Louvre has the same qualities in a more vivacious degree, and with a more striking effect. The master had already treated the subject in 1620 on a more imposing scale in a large canvas (6 feet 8·70 inches by 11 feet 10·51 inches) belonging to the Earl of Darnley at Cobham Park.<sup>2</sup> The Louvre copy is a vertical composition (8 feet 7·54 inches by 6 feet 6·34 inches) and gains greatly by its consequent condensation. It enables us to measure

<sup>1</sup> It was formerly at Blenheim, and was purchased by private contract before the public sale by Baron Edmond de Rothschild for £20,000.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Darnley also possesses the sketch for his picture.

the progress made by the artist in the twelve or fifteen years interval which separates the two works. By means of more moderate contrasts and more transparent shadows, he obtains a stronger effect. The distribution of the tones is better thought out, and the colours that should predominate have their full value. The queen's white



MARTYRDOM OF ST. LIÉVIN.  
Sketch for the picture in the Brussels Museum.  
(M. R. Kann's Collection.)

gold-embroidered gown, her ermine-lined white and gold cloak, drawing attention to her, set off the brilliance of the neighbouring blues and yellows, and harmonise powerfully yet delicately with the reds skilfully scattered through the picture. M. Max Rooses<sup>1</sup> wisely remarks that the execution outweighs the conception, and the pictorial qualities those of the drawing in these last works. Such observations would also apply to a *Coronation of St. Catherine* painted in 1633 for the Church of the Augustines at Mechlin;<sup>2</sup> the graceful attitudes and the style of the Saint

and of St. Margaret recall the women of Paolo Veronese, and in the St. Apollina we recognise one of the figures in the *Garden of Love*.

In a period of such unceasing production it was impossible that everything should possess equal value, or that there should be no

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres de Rubens*. Vol. IV, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> The picture is now in the Duke of Rutland's collection at Belvoir Castle.

weaknesses nor repetitions to note. Indeed, several of Rubens's works of this epoch compare ill with those we have just mentioned. It may have been that in abandoning himself so entirely to the joys of creation, he allowed himself to be carried away by his natural facility, or that



PLENTY.

(Baron Edmond de Rothschild's Collection.)

certain subjects appealed to him less, or that this excessive work resulted in a passing fatigue. The *Rape of the Sabines* in the National Gallery offers an example of this falling off. The subject was one which would attract the artist by its animation and brilliance, and by the opportunity it afforded of painting a number of pretty weeping

girls amid beautiful surroundings. But if the pompous arrangement of the composition, and the rich colour respond to the decorative exigencies of the programme that the artist laid down for himself, it must be confessed that the types and attitudes of the young girls—the figure of Helena may be recognised among them—are entirely lacking in distinction and style. Most of them are in commonplace postures, and their plump contours have nothing virginal. In the foreground, the two most in evidence, whom their ravishers attempt to lift on to a horse, with much effort and without much success, and another still more massive, the thick waist of whom a brave Roman is unable to encircle, hardly awaken our sympathies by their noisy manifestations of a somewhat false modesty, or of a somewhat awkwardly feigned despair.

However this may be, the versatility of Rubens's talent permitted him, as we have seen, to treat in turn the most varied subjects, to pass from a scene of gallantry to an historical composition, sacred or profane, if not with equal success, at least with equal spirit. The Prado owns a veritable *genre*-picture, *Rudolph of Hapsburg and the Priest*, which figured in an inventory of Philip IV's collections in 1636, and which was doubtless painted for the king a short time before. The founder of the House of Austria is represented leading his horse, which he has reverently yielded to a priest, bearer of the viaticum, whom he had chanced to meet while hunting. Behind, his squire in like manner leads the sacristan who accompanies the priest; but while the priest, holding the pyx, sits his horse with dignity, his acolyte, little accustomed to equestrian exercise, has some difficulty in preserving his equilibrium. This humorous touch indicated without exaggeration and with witty malice, is very rare in the master's works; it in no way detracts from the gravity of the scene, but rather helps to emphasise the prince's reverent expression. The effect is charming, and the olive green tones of the landscape, probably painted by Wildens, reinforce the varied greys scattered through the picture, the whitish grey of Rudolph's costume, the bluish-grey of the sacristan's breeches, the iron grey of his horse, and the tawny grey of the dogs. These sober

tones allow full value to the few bold notes, the squire's yellow doublet and slashed red sleeves. In the centre, the extremes of light and shadow given in the pure white of the priest's surplice, and the black of his gown, show off the general moderation of the tonality.

As time went on, Rubens painted fewer and fewer portraits, with the exception of those of Helena. But occasionally a portrait would provide him with an opportunity of refreshing his mind by a direct study from life. He excelled, as if in pure sport, in bringing out the most characteristic features, and when we examine the portraits painted at this period, we regret there are not more of them. In the *Head of an Old Bishop*, in the Dresden Gallery, signed and dated 1634, the modelling is most conscientious, though the proportions are slightly more than life-size, and the execution is somewhat summary. The touch in the hair and beard is liquid and unctuous; the pure vermilion of the eyelids, the high lights on the forehead, which indicate the polish of the flesh, and those on the nostrils, are firmly laid on and give an extraordinary illusiveness to the effect. Two portraits at Munich, which are reckoned among Rubens's masterpieces, are marked by the same decision, with greater charm and finish. The first in date, judging from the character of the execution, has long passed as that of Dr. Van Thulden, professor of law in the University of Louvain, and brother of Rubens's pupil, although the type, as M. Max Rooses remarks, differs completely from the portrait of him in Van Dyck's *Iconography*. A vague likeness to Martin Luther, perhaps, caused it to be described as a portrait of the reformer in the catalogue of an eighteenth century sale in which this picture is supposed to have been included. But the striking expression of individual life protests against such an hypothesis, and proves this to be a portrait painted from life. The assured expression, the intelligent, candid physiognomy, testify to the sitter's moral uprightness, while the bold handling corresponds marvellously with the impression of probity and strength which the artist had to represent. The simplicity of the attitude and of the background, which is indicated by a light rubbing of brown scarcely

covering the panel, the beauty and happy contrast of the black of the gown with that of the silk of the broad *revers*, enhance the effect of the masterly, luminous painting.

We are no better informed as to the identity of another portrait at Munich, vaguely entitled *An Old Scholar*, but the inscription on the panel tells us his age, and the date at which the picture was painted.



THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. URSULA.  
(Sketch in the Brussels Museum.)

Although his vigorous appearance, robust figure, and ruddy, fresh complexion show scarcely any signs of advanced age, this learned man was 75 years old when Rubens painted this spirited presentment of his loyal personality. He is radiant with good temper and health. His roguish mouth, his keen eyes, his thick hair, standing out from his head, his bushy moustaches and beard, his plump hands and ruddy face, betray the pleasant, vigorous comrade. If he is well

acquainted with Cicero, whose complete works are arranged behind him on a small shelf, with other venerable-looking tomes, it is equally certain that he has within reach a bottle of good wine, the fine aroma of which he enjoys when opportunity offers. Rubens doubtless delighted in the society of such a scholar, for his learning could not have been either crabbed or pedantic. The master makes him live again for us without effort or trace of hesitation; he reproduces his vivacious countenance, humid lips, and moist flesh, with that harmony

of all the features which is the supreme art of the portrait-painter. Every touch is true to the forms it renders, and helps the expression of life. Nothing is overdone; everything that ought to be said is said with perfect proportion, and only a painter of Rubens's genius could have produced such a spirited masterpiece, in a few hours, with so little effort.

Rubens's life ran a peaceful, active course, filled with continuous



RUDOLPH OF HAPSBURG AND THE PRIEST.

(The Prado.)

work, and happy domestic affections. He had reached the zenith of his fame and honours, and remained simple, kindly, benevolent. He enjoyed the society of Rockox, Gevaert, and all the most eminent men and artists of Antwerp; neither did he forget his French friends, Dupuy, Peiresc, and his brother Valavès. While he had been absorbed by politics, his correspondence with them, so regular at first, gradually fell off, and at last ceased altogether. It was not only the numerous calls on his time as a diplomatist that caused its cessation; his missions often compelled him to oppose the policy of France, and to take part

against her. Richelieu, who was always accurately informed of what was going on, knew of his action, rumours of which reached all whose position at court made it necessary for them to be cognisant of affairs. The part the painter-diplomatist had played in Spain and England against France was well known, and justified the suspicion with which he was regarded in the latter country. Peiresc, more than others, deplored this state of things. Apart from his affection for the artist, he grieved to be cut off from the constant interchange of ideas on a multitude of subjects which interested both. He wrote to Dupuy regarding a communication he would have liked to have been able to make to Rubens (April 4, 1633): "If the misunderstandings of the present condition of affairs did not compel me to break off all intercourse with Rubens, I should have made an attempt to communicate with him. But at such a period I would not for the world permit a person who has been for some time employed as we have heard, to see any letters of mine."

The situation, however, had somewhat changed. Rubens seemed to have shaken himself free of politics, a fact of which he had probably taken care to inform Peiresc through Nicholas Picquery, the Antwerp merchant living at Marseilles; they had both often availed themselves of his assistance in sending one another parcels. Rubens, by his marriage with Helena, had become Picquery's brother-in-law,<sup>1</sup> and on his intervention, Peiresc determined to reconcile himself with his friend, "which he did with the more confidence, he told Dupuy (December 26, 1630), since the merchant assured him that Rubens had taken up his ordinary work again more assiduously than ever; this presupposes an abandonment of the mission which divided us all during the past storms, so that henceforth there will be less reason to refrain from sometimes telling him our news." Archæology furnished Peiresc with an excuse for renewing their regular correspondence. We know the learned Provençal's passion for the study of antiquity. He was now employed in carefully studying the

<sup>1</sup> Picquery married in 1627, Elizabeth Fourment, Helena's sister, her senior by five years.





XXXVI

*The "Ronda."*

(THE PRADO.)



Hélios, Dayardin

Printed by Gey, Gros, Paris, France



weights and measures in use among the ancients, and had just learned that a silver spoon, in the hollow of which was engraved, "a Mercury accompanied by his cock and his kid," had been found among the vases and other objects discovered at Autun or in its environs. It had been sold to a dealer at Avignon who had re-sold it to Rubens, at Paris. . . . Reasons of jealousy (between France and Spain) seeming to have ceased, "he decided to consult his friend about the spoon and other things, knowing how well-informed and intelligent he was in the matter of ancient works." Thus appealed to, Rubens was all the more anxious to reply to Peiresc, since he, too, had a favour to ask him. His letter, dated December 18, is undoubtedly the most important of all that we possess by him ; it contains seven pages, and its length<sup>1</sup> is sufficiently explained by Rubens's wish, not only to be agreeable to Peiresc, but to inform him of the events of his life since the break in their relations. We have already quoted from this letter, written with a fluent pen in Italian, the passage relating to his second marriage, in which he states the reasons that led him to conclude it. Rubens began by assuring his correspondent of "the incredible joy his letter gave him, and the extreme pleasure he took in reading it, and learning that his friend continued more ardently than ever to show the same curiosity in his researches into antiquity. . . . His excuses for his long silence are reasonable enough, and considering the suspicions and malignity which are the danger of the present time, and the important part he (Rubens) had played in the negotiations, Peiresc could not possibly have acted otherwise." To reassure him, Rubens informed him of his withdrawal from public affairs, emphasising his assurance in the following terms : "Three years ago to-day, I, of my own will, renounced every sort of work, except that belonging to my beloved profession. We have both experienced the vicissitudes of Fortune ; as for me, I am under great obligations to her, for I can say without vanity that my missions and

<sup>1</sup> It belongs to the National Library, Paris, from which it was stolen by Libri. It was recovered by the watchful care of M. Léopold Delisle. We reproduce the two first pages of the letter and the signature in fac-simile.

Molon Rued. e Molon Jllust. 26 mo ottobre

La gratissima di VS del 24 del passato mi fu  
 issa dal mo Cognato J. J. Piquery de un game un  
 fauore tanto preazato che mi causo stupore et fieri  
 debite allegrezza al spettante et despo un gusto estremo  
 a Leggenda, videndo che VS continua con più feruore  
 per granar per il passato la sua <sup>solita</sup> fantasia nel fruidicare  
 tutti gli misteri delle antiquita Romane. Le scuse  
 del suo solatio sono fuerete per il so in un gene  
 Imaginato la causa più essenziale, del publice albingo  
 d'alcuni forestieri che si sono ritirati in questa Parte  
 et à dire il vero Considerando il sospetto e malitia  
 che nade periculoso il seculo corrente et el Grande Impiego  
 chio ebbe in quel negocio non quadra VS poter far  
 altrimenti, Hora mi trouo da <sup>in sa</sup> in anni per la Giacca  
diuina cal aniano quito haucendo rinunciato ad ogni sorte  
d'Impiegi fuori della mia dolcissima professione.  
 Expressi sumus fruere fortuna vergo alla quale so gran  
 obbligo perche passo dure senza ambitione che gli mei  
 Impiegi e viaggi di Spagna et Inghilterra mi riuscirono  
 felicissimi con buon resito de negocij giusti et pubesca  
 soddisfazione de committenti et ancora della parte,  
 et perche VS sappia el tutto, mi furono de poi confidate  
 (duo a me solo) tutte le pratiche secrete de Francia touante  
 la fuga della Reyna Madre et ancora del J. Duc de Orleans  
 del Regno de Francia e la permissione de saluarse nel  
 nostro asilo di maniera che potri fornire ad un Historico  
 gran materia e la pura verita del caso ben duento da  
 quello che si credi generale. Hora trouandomi in questo  
 Labirinto e sempre obsessio notte e giorno di un Contraggio

assai importuno e fuor della <sup>mia</sup> *Caray* per el spacio di  
 nove mesi douendo assistere continuat<sup>o</sup> alla Corte  
 et amuato al Colmo della <sup>buona</sup> *gracia* della *Signe* <sup>ma</sup> *Infantina*  
 (che sia *Inglona*) e della *Ministra* maggior del Re et  
 auendo dato ogni contento e gusto alla parte straniera  
 presi resolutione di far violenza a me stesso et di  
 tagliar questo nodo dorò d'ambitione per ricouar la  
*buona* *liberta*, e considerando che bisogna far balotini  
 nel voto e non nella scissa, e lasciar la fortuna manar<sup>a</sup>  
 chatta u' applaude senza aspettar ch'ella da se u' volta la  
 scilena mi gittai (colla ouasione di un viaggiato secreto)  
 alla guida de' *S. A.* pigliandola per misericordia tanta  
 facile la sola retentione di tal *impedimento* e permissione  
 di seruire in casa mia La qual *gracia* ottinir con  
 molto maggior difficulta et alcuna altra ch'ella mi  
 habbia giamas concessa con riserva però di alcune *In-*  
*trigione* e pratiche scente de' *S. A.* che si poteuano con-  
 uenire con minor scommodo Doppo quell'ora non mi  
 sono più impacciato delle cose di francia ne giamas mi  
 sono proibito d'auer preso tal resolutione. Hora mi  
 troio per la *gracia* diuina come *U. S. A.* *fratello* del *fratello*  
*Piquery* colla mia moglie e figliuoli in riposo, e senza  
 alcuna protrasiote al mondo che di uerire in Pace  
 io mi risolli al matrimonio non trouandomi anchora atto  
 alla abstinentia del *Celibato* et si come *primas* *damus* alla  
 mortificatione *quimus* *licita* *voluptate* cum *Satiacione*  
*actione* *sed*, e presi una moglie, giovane de' *Parenti* *Sonia*  
 per *Cittadina* benchè *habe* *uoluerano* *persuaderom* di *casam*  
*in* *Corte* ma io *tenua* *Commune* *illud* *nobilitate* *malum*  
*Supremam* *gratiam* *in* *illo* *sexu* *et* *prope* *in* *praeque* *una*  
 che non si mouerebbe *uindictam* *propheta* *glia* *propheta* *in* *ma*  
 et a due *se* *uero* *se* *tesoro* *della* *gratiosa* *libertas* *in*  
 parue duro di perdere sol cambio delli abbracciamenti  
 di una vecchia, Ecco la relatione della mia vita Doppo  
 la suspensione della nostra *Correspondenza* de' figliuoli di

che sono  
 fine di gas  
 teste

which he became acquainted in his first journey to Spain; the other, with a balance similar to the so-called Roman balance, which ensured, he thought, greater exactness. Summary sketches on the margin helped to elucidate the descriptions. Then, taking leave of his

friend, "whose hands he kissed a million times with all his heart," the master signed himself, *Pietro Paolo Rubens*. (See facsimile below.)



THOMYRIS AND CYRUS.  
(The Louvre.)

But the letter was not finished. As it in proof of the old adage that the most important things are contained in the postscript, Rubens continued, as if carelessly: "I thought I had finished, and I just remember that I have a lawsuit at Paris in the Court of Parliament against a certain engraver, a German by birth, but a citizen of Paris, who in spite of

the renewal of my privilege granted by the most Christian king three years ago, has copied my engravings to my great loss

*Pietro Paolo Rubens*

and prejudice. Although my son Albert had him condemned by the civil lieutenant, when a verdict in my favour was notified to him, he appealed to the Parliament. I beg you then to help me with your influence and to recommend the justice of my



cause to the President or to some friend of yours among the Councillors, and if by chance you know him, to the Judge-Advocate whose name is Saulnier, Counsellor in the Court of the second Chamber



PORTRAIT OF DR. VAN THULDEN.  
(Munich Gallery.)

of Inquiries. I hope you will be the more willing to do me this favour, since it was by your intervention that I first obtained the privilege from his most Christian Majesty. I confess that the affair

causes me both vexation and annoyance, and I should be more obliged for your assistance than for any favour in more important matters. But haste is imperative, *ne veniat post bellum auxilium!* Forgive me for my importunity." Rubens had the matter much at heart, and had often, on similar occasions, done his utmost to obtain justice from these pirates. But in order to hide in some degree the strength of his desire, and not to give Peiresc too strong an impression of his eagerness in the matter, the artist added certain complimentary civilities. He sent affectionate remembrances from Rockox, and returning to archæology, mentioned a certain agate vase for which he paid the respectable sum of 2000 gold crowns, and relates its wanderings before he became its possessor. Then asking for news of Valavès, Peiresc's brother, he once again takes leave of his correspondent, *Iterum vale*. But he had not finished yet, and the bottom of the seventh page contains a last postscript: "Be kind enough to address your letter *Secretary of His Catholic Majesty in the Cabinet or Privy Council*, instead of *Gentleman-in-Ordinary of the Household*, &c. I do not ask this from vanity, but to ensure the delivery of your letters, if you do not send them through my relative, Picquery." Peiresc had been pleased to hear of the honour conferred on his friend, for three years previously he had written (July 18, 1627) to Dupuy: "I shall congratulate Rubens at the first opportunity on his new dignity which I formerly gave him in my letters (that of Gentleman-in-Ordinary of the Infanta's Household); I used almost to upbraid him for not obtaining it, if only because it looks so well on the addresses of his letters."

The long extracts from this letter, which treats of such varied subjects, prove that Rubens had preserved all his activity and vivacity of mind. Peiresc, delighted at the renewal of the correspondence, did not fail repeatedly to beg his friend Dupuy to use all his influence with the judges charged with the affair of the piracy.

Thus solicited, Dupuy intervened with the magistracy in Rubens's favour, and he gained his cause. Thanking his friend for the efficacy







Printed by Draeger, Paris.



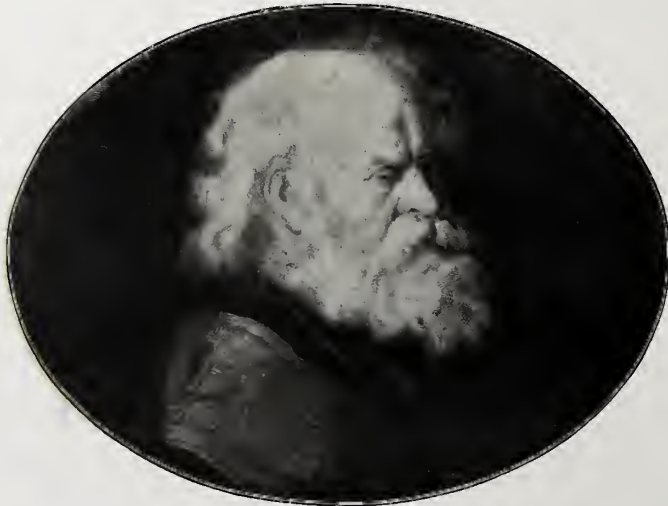
of his intervention, Peiresc assured him that "he had done the public a great service, for if the case had been lost the artist would have been disgusted, and the public would have been deprived of many noble conceptions that were in his mind, which would come to light if he was freed from such preoccupations. . . . I also conceived the hope that the long interrupted correspondence between you, might, as in my case, be renewed, since Rubens has withdrawn from the affairs which caused its cessation. But if things come to a rupture, other interludes must be made—a circumstance I shall greatly regret" (Letter of February 26, 1635). A few days after (March 20, 1643), returning to the subject with the same delicacy, Peiresc deplors the fact that "this declaration of a rupture may entirely interrupt the little intercourse with Rubens that remains . . . a thing to be much regretted, for he has begun to tell the most interesting things, anent certain admirable observations that he has made on the marvels of nature and art. I had the advantage of him, however, in my own observations concerning the anatomy of the eyes, a subject that had long attracted him, and had made him begin a discussion on colour that I should have liked him to finish before the rupture." It would have been very interesting to learn Rubens's opinions on such a subject, for with his good sense and keen powers of observation, they would have been most instructive.

Peiresc's zealous affection and the support of his Paris friends, secured "the good Rubens" a favourable verdict from the Parliament of Paris in the lawsuit against his despoilers. As an expression of his gratitude, doubtless, the artist sent to Provence for Peiresc "a casket on which was stamped a large antique agate vase, adorned with branches of vine, and heads of satyrs," and a multitude of other antique works relating chiefly to the weights and measures of the ancients that Peiresc was then studying. He found positive confirmation of his conclusions in the packet, and on April 15, 1635, wrote to Dupuy: "You may think how much this has affected me. . . . If there was anything ungracious in my manner of acknowledging this, and other objects, worthy of Rubens's greatness and genius, it was because my poor mind was then overwhelmed and crippled and incapable of

verifying such kindnesses.<sup>1</sup> But the things gave me pleasure and diverted me for an hour from my sufferings, and were therefore useful in the need I have of distractions strong enough to take my mind off the thoughts that torture me.”

We leave the two friends with regret. Peiresc's open mind, and loyal, affectionate nature, made him just the man to obtain the great artist's confidence. - Rubens, on his side, when he saw himself the object of such tender affection, could not resist his correspondent's attempts to obtain from him the cordial exchange of ideas that give value to the letters by which we learn to know them both.

<sup>1</sup> Peiresc had just been seriously attacked by a kind of semi-paralysis from which he never completely recovered.



PORTRAIT OF AN OLD BISHOP.

(Dresden Gallery.)

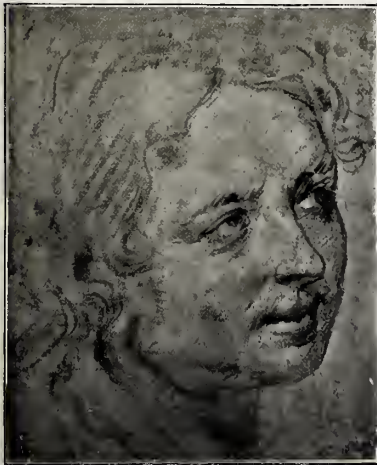




BRIDGE AND ENTRANCE, CHATEAU OF STEEN.  
(Drawing by Boudier. From a photograph.)

## CHAPTER IX

RUBENS IS COMMISSIONED TO DECORATE ANTWERP FOR THE ENTRY OF THE ARCHDUKE FERDINAND—HE BUYS THE CHÂTEAU OF STEEN—LANDSCAPES AND STUDIES FROM NATURE—THE “STABLE”—THE “RAINBOW”—THE “RETURN FROM THE FIELDS”—THE “RONDA” (THE PRADO)—THE “KERMESSE” (THE LOUVRE).



STUDY OF THE HEAD OF A YOUNG WOMAN.  
Albertina Collection.  
(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)

IN the letter to Peiresc, dated December 18, 1630, the letter from which we have so largely quoted, Rubens apologised for not answering his friend's questions as fully as he could have wished. He wrote: "I am so busy with preparations for the triumphal entry of the Cardinal-Infant (to take place a month hence) that I have no time either to live or to write. I even do wrong to the work by spending a few hours of the night in answering your delightful letter in this insufficient and careless fashion. The magistracy

has put the whole conduct of the festivities on my shoulders. The

decorations would please you, I think, by their variety and fertility of invention, novelties of composition, and propriety of application. Perhaps some day you may be able to judge for yourself; you may see the reproductions, which will be adorned with admirable inscriptions and legends by our dear Gevaert (who affectionately kisses your hands). Owing to this press of work, it will be necessary to drop our correspondence for a time; it is quite impossible for me to answer the questions in your letter just now."

The Cardinal-Infant to whom Rubens refers was the Archduke Ferdinand, only brother of Philip IV. He was made a cardinal at the age of fourteen, but had no vocation for the Church. From his early youth he showed a marked taste for violent exercises, particularly for hunting, of which he was passionately fond. Later on he begged his brother "to give him a dispensation, for he was certainly born to be a soldier." He wears a cardinal's dress, however, in the Munich portrait already mentioned, painted by Rubens during his visit to Madrid. It represents Ferdinand at the age of nineteen, with his thick lips, heavy protruding eyes, and good-humoured expression. At the instance of his aunt, the Governor of the Low Countries, who was weary of politics, and desirous of leading a life of piety, the king determined to send his brother to Brussels to help the Princess. But in order to initiate him into the methods of government, he sent him first in 1632 to Barcelona, whence, having held for some time the post of Governor of Catalonia, Ferdinand embarked for Italy on April 10, 1633. He was at Milan towards the close of this year when he heard of his aunt's death. The Marquis d'Aytona was appointed to perform the functions of governor until Ferdinand's arrival. The Archduke assembled troops in order to ally himself on his way with the King of Hungary and fight against the chief of the reformers, Duke Bernard of Weimar. The united armies inflicted a crushing defeat on him at Nordlingen on September 6, 1634.

Two months had passed since this victory when Ferdinand came to take over the government at Brussels. A week later, the

magistracy of Antwerp begged him to visit their town. On his acceptance, the municipality resolved to give him a magnificent reception. These pageants had always appealed to a people eager for picturesque spectacles. The old Flemish town preserved the memory of the *fêtes* held in 1520, for the entry of the Emperor Charles V., *fêtes* which, as is well known, excited the wonder of Albert Dürer, who chanced to be staying in the city at the time. A little while after, in 1549, Pieter Coech of Alost had in his turn employed his best skill as decorator for the "welcoming of Prince Philip of Spain," according to the plates brought out by the artist afterwards, in which the principal subjects of his decorations were reproduced.

The official entry of the Archduke being fixed for the middle of January, 1635, there was no time to lose if the work was to be carried out well. Rubens had been hastily commissioned to draw up a scheme for the proposed decorations, in conjunction with his two friends, the old burgomaster, N. Rockox and G. Gevaert, the municipal secretary, who was to furnish the devices and Latin legends for the inscriptions. Rubens, on his part, occupied himself with cartoons for all the works ordered by the municipality, and further engaged to paint by his own hand several of the large canvases which were to figure in them, and to superintend the execution of the whole. A sum of 5,000 florins was allowed him for the various works, and painters or sculptors like Cornelis de Vos, Jordaens, Cornelis Schut, Van Thulden, J. Wildens, David Ryckaert, Erasmus Quellin, and others received sums in proportion to the tasks committed to them. The total estimate originally reached 36,000 florins, a very respectable sum for that period. But the exceptionally severe winter, and the defence of the Spanish frontiers, menaced just then by the French troops, compelled the Prince to delay his journey; it was first postponed until February 3, and again till April 17, on which day the ceremony took place. By reason of these delays the original programme, which comprised two triumphal arches, four theatres, and an immense portico, was gradually enlarged, and the town granted subsidies to the two

corporations, the Guild of St. Luke and the Chamber of Rhetoric, the *Golden Marigold*, which offered to organise *tableaux vivants*, in which the members of these societies would represent the genealogical tree of the House of Austria in costumes made for the occasion, and an allegorical scene in honour of the Archduke.

All this entailed greater expense, and the subsidies were increased



TRIUMPHAL ARCH IN HONOUR OF THE ARCHDUKE FERDINAND.

(Facsimile of an engraving by Van Thulden.)

by more than double, the cost amounting to over 78,000 florins; the payment of the deficit thus caused in the municipal finances was long a source of strife between the magistracy and the citizens. It was true that such a *fête* could only be organised by Antwerp, with its pleiad of talented artists; it eagerly seized the opportunity for displaying their genius in rendering homage to its new ruler. But while the municipality was anxious to gain the good graces of the Archduke by celebrating his ancient race,

and the glorious victory he had just won, they purposed to turn his visit to account, taking this opportunity of giving expression to their wishes, and of remonstrating against the disabilities under which their town laboured in the present position of affairs. Antwerp, in fact, could not congratulate itself on the policy of its governors; and the treaties already concluded, as well as those which were being prepared, threatened its trade more and more by impeding the free

navigation of the Scheldt. Petitions had therefore to be carefully mingled in just proportion with the praises addressed to the prince. They could, it is true, trust Gevaert to give these official eulogies the most refined expression in the most flowery Latin ; but, without insisting too much on the complaints that he had to formulate, nor on the redress that they wished to obtain, it was necessary that he should make himself understood, and this part of the programme was assuredly very delicate. Still, Rubens's intelligence and patriotism well fitted him to deal with this difficult task, which was not wholly new to him, and which gratified his tastes. To assist him he had not only the traditions of the past, but also the memory of his own apprenticeship, for in his youth he had probably assisted his master, Van Veen, in the decorations furnished by him for the entry of the Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella into Antwerp, on September 5, 1599. But Rubens was not the man to confine himself to a servile imitation of others, and his conceptions bore the stamp of his individuality both in their qualities and defects.



TRIUMPHAL ARCH AT THE ABBEY CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL.

(Fac-simile of an engraving by Van Thulden.)

The great artist had first of all to occupy himself with the architec-

tural portion, which in works of this kind plays such an important part. Once more he affirmed his preference for the Italian style, a preference he had already manifested in former works. He had an immense admiration for the buildings of Italy, and had given proof of it in the style of the pavilion and porticoes in the garden and courtyard of his own sumptuous dwelling, called by his fellow-countrymen the *Italian Palace*. We know, too, from the preface to his *Palaces of Genoa*, published in 1622, that he dreamed of introducing "the beautiful architectural symmetry of Græco-Roman antiquity" into Flanders. But we should be disappointed if we sought the purity and sobriety of Greek art, or even of that of the Italian Renaissance as manifested by Leonardo, Bramante, or Raphael, in Rubens's compositions. His forms are always exuberant, and his overloaded structures are based in reality on the Genoese style of which Carlo Maderno and Galeazzo Alessi are the representatives. Rubens amplified them in transforming them to accord with his own taste, but his creative and well-balanced mind is apparent through all his exaggerations. The proportions, although not invariably happy, are clearly defined, and exhibit bold projections and profiles in their main lines. A certain heaviness, however, spoils the general effect of the triumphal arches, an error caused, in our opinion, by the artist's too exclusive adherence to his sympathies as a painter. The masterpieces in this style left us by the ancients are invariably simple in design; they consist of a gateway, flanked by columns and surmounted by bas-reliefs of no great height. Rubens departed from this rational conception, giving the upper part an excessive development in order to leave a larger space for the painting which was to form its decoration, and diminishing the height of the lower portion of the structure to keep this well within sight. The gateways, instead of having the elegant proportions given them in the arches of the ancients, look stunted, and, as it were, over-weighted by the mass above them. The master did his best to counteract this defect by lightening the upper part of the structure; he pierced it here and there with bays, open balustrades, or colonnades, the uneven silhouettes of which stand out against the sky. His prodigious fertility



XXXVII

*The "Kermesse."*

(THE LOUVRE.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)





Printed by Gery-Gros Paris (France)

Michel Brouss, Clement et C<sup>m</sup>



of invention enabled him to accompany these decorations with a crowd of symbolical attributes appropriate to the various episodes he proposed to represent.

But it was easy to foresee that the creative instinct and practised eye of the great colourist would triumph in such a task. If, in his pictures, Rubens is sometimes thoughtlessly lavish of the riches of his palette, in these compositions he judiciously economises his colours, and arranges them so as to produce the greatest possible effect. For the essential features and solid portions of his structures, he wisely adopted medium and neutral tones, which he skilfully contrasted one with another. Brown, grey, green, or reddish marble served as a setting for the paintings. Dull gilding, armorial bearings, foliage, or banners enabled him to render some particular tone predominant, or to moderate the brilliance of another.

After arranging all that concerned the purely decorative part of the work, the painter was at liberty to execute those portions of the great scheme that specially devolved on him, and, thus accompanied, his compositions produced their full effect. Rubens put the whole strength of his imagination, and all the breadth and vivacity of his handling into the work. However crowded the conception, however vast the enterprise, he remained calm and firm, ever master of himself. Undoubtedly, owing to the haste forced on him, he introduced several reminiscences of his former productions in this huge work, and it is easy to recognise in passing many of the pieces he had already used ; to find, for example, in the *Triumph of Ferdinand* the principal elements of the *Triumph of Henry IV.* ; in the *Temple of Janus*, the general arrangement and some of the details of the frontispiece of the *Annals of the Dukes of Brabant* drawn for the Plantin Press. But these transpositions came into his mind spontaneously, in the course of the enormous work that he had to improvise. He knew how to change his tone and could speak in every language. Was it a question of lavishing on the king's brother, the conqueror of Nordlingen, the praises due to the prestige of his rank, or to the renown of his personal exploits? In order to obtain the good will of

the dispenser of all favours for the town of Antwerp, Rubens spared neither delicate allusions nor the coarse adulation which was then admissible. The gods of Olympus and allegorical figures of the loftiest virtues formed the retinue of the prince, and heaped every form of panegyric upon him to exhaustion. Even without the aid of mottoes which served as commentaries, the artist clearly explained his meaning with supreme suppleness and lucidity. The choice of subjects, the gestures and actions of the figures, the attributes that accompany them, leave no room for doubt in the mind of the spectator.

We can only mention here such of the great canvases as, after having borne their part in the vast scheme of decoration, are now scattered throughout the various collections of Europe, to which they only found their way after many vicissitudes, for the most part seriously damaged. The Vienna Gallery owns three of them; the *Meeting of the Archduke and the King of Hungary on the Field of Nordlingen*, and the portraits of these two princes; two other portraits, both by the hand of Rubens, those of the Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella, belong to the Brussels Museum, and two large figures in *grisaille* to the Lille Museum; lastly, *Neptune Calming the Waves*, known under the name of *Quos Ego!* a work retouched by the master, which was purchased in 1742 by the Count of Brühl, is now in the Dresden Gallery. But with their summary and somewhat coarse handling, these waifs saved from the wreck scarcely give an idea of the whole scheme as the artist conceived it. We can more completely appreciate the originality and richness of his compositions, the vivacity and inimitable charm of his brush, in the sketches that have come down to us. The greater number of these sketches are fortunately preserved, but, like the great canvases for which they served as models, they are scattered over Europe; in England, the Marquis of Bute owns that of the *Temple of Janus*, and Mr. Abraham Hume that of the picture in the Vienna Gallery; M. Léon Bonnat has that of the *Bellerophon*; the Antwerp Museum those of the two sides of the Triumphal Arch of the Mint. Lastly, the Hermitage possesses no less than seven of these sketches, all in excellent preservation, and formerly in the

collection of Sir Robert Walpole; *Five Statues of Sovereigns of the House of Hapsburg*; *The Cardinal-Infant taking leave of Philip IV.*;



SKETCH OF THE BELLEROPHON PAINTED FOR THE DECORATIONS USED AT THE ARCHDUKE FERDINAND'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO ANTWERP (1635).

(M. Léon Bonnat's Collection.)

*The Victories of the Cardinal-Infant* (two in number); *The Apotheosis of the Cardinal-Infant*; *The Departure of Mercury*; and *The Temple of Janus*. The study of these different fragments is peculiarly in-

structive. Nowhere, indeed, do the genius of Rubens, his vivacity and his fertile imagination appear in so striking a manner. With the promptitude demanded by the short space of time accorded him, he had to give these rapid sketches a directness that would make them readily understood. Since his collaborators had to transpose the sketches into works of considerable dimensions,<sup>1</sup> any mistake on his part, thus enlarged, would have been absolutely offensive. Spontaneity and precision were therefore his main preoccupation here. If some features of doubtful taste, or some over-subtle inventions have crept into these improvisations, it is only just, at least, for the most part, to father them on Gevaert, who would not have lost such an opportunity of parading the subtleties of which he was so fond.

But whatever foundation there may be for such criticisms, it never occurs to us to formulate them in the presence of these vivid, boldly inspired sketches, in which fancy is so naturally combined with good sense, and where the association of the most dissimilar ideas is made plausible, animated as they are by the master's powerful inspiration, expressed in so brilliant and spirited a form. The period of life which means decay and need of rest for other men, heightened Rubens's creative faculties, for never in his best years did he show more marvellous facility and vivacity.

To finish this colossal task the artist had overtaxed his strength. Suffering already from gout, he was obliged, in addition to his own personal share in the work, to superintend and hurry on the labours of his collaborators. As the pain increased, and prevented him from walking, or even from standing, he was pushed in a wheeled chair from workshop to workshop, to encourage his assistants, and bring the enterprise to a successful issue. Everything was ready by the appointed day, and on April 17, 1635, the Archduke, who had arrived the day before at the citadel of Antwerp, where he spent the night, made his entry into the town about four o'clock in the afternoon, attended by

<sup>1</sup> These dimensions varied from 59 feet 0.66 inch by 101 feet 8.47 inches, both for the width and height of the structures.

a numerous and brilliant crowd of the gentlemen of his court and the neighbourhood. A gathering of the military associations awaited him at St. George's Gate, where the burgomaster, Robert Tucher, complimented and welcomed him. Then, following the route agreed upon, he admired on the way all the decorations put up in his honour. After a brief halt at the cathedral, he reached the abbey of St. Michael, where, according to custom, apartments had been provided for him. Addresses, bouquets, flourishes of trumpets, salvoes of musketry, illuminations, fireworks—nothing was wanting to the *fête*. But when the hero of the occasion looked round to congratulate the chief author of the decorations, he learned that Rubens, overcome by fatigue, and the disease from which he suffered, had been obliged to remain at home. On the following day the Archduke honoured him with a visit, to congratulate and thank him.

The success of the undertaking had answered the expectations of the city, and to please the people, the decorations remained up for a month. By way of preserving the memory of them, the magistrates voted the funds necessary for printing an *édition de luxe* of a work in which Van Thulden etched the general scheme, and some of the important details. A year afterwards it was resolved to offer the Archduke some of the most notable paintings which had formed part of it; but as a large number of them were already damaged, it was necessary to restore them before sending them to him. Rubens, who had received an additional sum for these restorations, was commissioned together with Jacques Breyel, the municipal treasurer, to instal them in the prince's palace, and from February 1 to 6, 1637, they both visited Brussels to choose a suitable place for them. The expense of the restorations, the cost of frames for the pictures, and pedestals for the statues, still further increased the deficit in the city's finances made by the additions to the original grant. In order to recoup themselves in some degree, the municipality ordered the sale of the remainder of the pictures; but as they had been exposed to the rain, and to injuries of every kind, the price offered for them was so

contemptible, that they were put away in the hope that they might be of use on another occasion.<sup>1</sup>

The publication ordered by the magistracy to preserve the memory of this solemn entry was delayed by Gevaert's slowness in delivering the text. The volume did not appear until 1642—that is, two years after the death of Rubens, and some months after that of the



PORTRAIT OF THE ARCHDUKE ALBERT (1635) PAINTED FOR FERDINAND TRIUMPHAL ENTRY.

(Brussels Museum.)

Archduke—under the somewhat complicated title of: *Pompa introitus honori Seren<sup>ss</sup> Princ. Ferdinandi Austriaci cum mox ad Nordlingum parta victoria, Antverpiam auspiciatissimo adventu suo bearet*. The delay made it possible to include the description and the engraving of a triumphal car, also designed by Rubens, on the occasion of the victory gained over the Dutch at Calloo by the Archduke on June 21, 1638, and of another success obtained some days later over the French troops by Prince Thomas

of Carignan, not far from Saint-Omer. This car, which figured in the procession of the communal *fête* of that year, was in the form of a ship on which allegorical figures were grouped; in the middle towered a great trophy of arms and standards taken from the enemy. The sketch of this chariot, painted by Rubens, is in the

<sup>1</sup> These details are borrowed from M. Max Rooses' valuable study on the entry of the Archduke into Antwerp. *Œuvre de Rubens*, Vol. III, p. 292-336.



Antwerp museum, and surpasses those which we have already mentioned in vigour of touch and elegance of composition. On the panel, covered with a light rubbing, we see written in the master's hand all the necessary directions for the guidance of the builders, as well as the devices for the scrolls. Rubens also marked on the plan the positions the allegorical figures and the trophy were to occupy. It is probable that he would not accept payment for the work, for the magistracy offered him as honorarium a cask of French wine for which, according to the accounts in the archives of Antwerp, 84 florins were paid to the merchant Christoffel van Wesel.

The excessive fatigue imposed on Rubens by these different works had gradually injured his health, which was already impaired by his long visits to Spain and England.

His talent, his intellectual powers, the charm of his society, his great reputa-

tion, the high connections that he had formed in Europe, the artistic treasures he had collected, all united to bring him into prominence, and to attract numerous visitors to his house. Under these conditions, it was very difficult for him to protect himself from the solicitations of all sorts to which he was exposed at Antwerp. Besides, as time went on he felt the need of leading a quieter life in the midst of his family, one more in accordance



PORTRAIT OF THE ARCHDUCHESS ISABELLA (1635) PAINTED FOR FERDINAND'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY.

(Brussels Museum.)

with his age and tastes. He had always been fond of the country, but so far, landscape had only formed the background of his works. If he recognised how well the light skies and bluish green foliage against which they stood set off the flesh-tints of his figures, he generally left the care of executing what he considered mere accessories in his great works, to his collaborators. He was thus content for a long time to consult nature in a somewhat summary fashion. But by degrees he became more exacting, and filled his memory and his sketch-book with detailed and accurate notes, made during his walks. At one time it would be hastily drawn sketches of plants and trees, at another, figures of workmen and peasants drawn from life in their familiar attitudes, or a multitude of picturesque features which he utilised for his great compositions, and which he finally made the principal subjects of pictures. Such is the case in the *Prodigal Son*, bought in 1894 for the Antwerp Museum. Round the central figure—a wretched, pale, weak creature, meagrely clad in a rag of green woollen stuff—he grouped the most varied objects and animals: saddles, harness, shovels, brooms, baskets, a cart, poultry, cows lying down or standing up in a thick litter of straw, pigs, stout Flemish horses before a well-filled manger, etc., etc. All this is easily indicated with a quick, sure touch, in a low scale, made up of varied browns relieved only by the red bodice and light grey skirt of the servant feeding the pigs. But everywhere there is movement and life, carefully observed and accurately reproduced.

Insensibly the artist acquired a taste for the peace of rural life, for on May 29, 1627, he bought of Jacques Loemans, in the district of Eeckeren, a small property with a villa surrounded by water, known by the name of *Hoff van Urssel*, where he doubtless intended henceforth to spend a considerable part of his time. But he scarcely lived there at all, for his diplomatic missions had kept him abroad during the ensuing years. Now that he was back in his own country and that his life was more settled, his desire for independence, and his failing health renewed his wish to pass the summer in the country. Whether he had ceased to care for the Eeckeren



*Study for the "Garden of Love" in the Prado.*

(THE LOUVRE.)



Printed by Draeger, Paris.



property (which, however, remained in his possession till his death), or whether he did not consider it in keeping with his position and wealth, or whether again an opportunity of making an advantageous investment offered, we cannot say; but Rubens purchased the manor of Steen in the district of Ellewyt, between Mechlin and Vilvorde, on May 12, 1635, for 93,000 florins.<sup>1</sup> It was a considerable estate, comprising a farm which let at 2,400 florins, other land, woods, and ponds. The farm-buildings, the farmhouse, and the mansion, a strong old castle, were surrounded by water on all sides, and were approached by a bridge guarded in the middle by a tall square tower, and at the end by a drawbridge and portcullis. The master seems to have wished to evoke recollections of mediæval Steen in the charming sketch of the *Tournament* in the Louvre, by which Delacroix was more than once inspired. Rubens loved to reconstruct the past, and the composition represents six knights in armour tilting near the castle, which is dominated by the tall silhouette of the tower, and situated in a landscape glowing with the last rays of the setting sun. But although he could reconstruct the spectacle of such violent jousts with poetic fidelity, the artist was not satisfied to live amid the relics of a past age. The towers, ramparts, loopholes, and machicolations of Steen were not the setting that he dreamed of for his own existence. A friend of peace, he could not bear to be surrounded by the souvenirs of an age devoted to incessant warfare, and all the violence thereby entailed. He was no sooner installed than he set about making the old fortress more habitable for his family, better suited to his tastes and his work. The tower, the drawbridge, the machicolations soon disappeared, and the painter built a convenient studio. The castle archives inform us that he devoted a sum of 7,000 florins to these different works, and we find in his will the name of the contractor to whom they were entrusted. Jan Colaes, the master-mason of Steen, seems to have been fond of pictures, and Rubens must have been satisfied with his performances; from the trustees' accounts, we learn that he left him two copies, one of a *Christ Triumphant*, the other of a *Venus with Jupiter*

<sup>1</sup> Equivalent to about £24,000 at the present time.

as a *Satyr*, which he had promised him during alterations carried out by his orders.

It would be interesting to discover in the present buildings some trace of their condition in Rubens's time. But Steen was completely transformed some years ago by Baron Coppens, who, shortly before his death, made an elegant mansion of it in an entirely modern style. I owe, however, to the kindness of the Baroness Coppens the two photographs admirably reproduced by M. Boudier, which give some idea of the old building with the Flemish gables, and latticed windows



VIEW OF THE CHÂTEAU OF STEEN.  
(Drawing by Boudier. From a photograph.)

of one of the façades, and the traces of machicolations and semicircular arched doors on the other. A superb landscape in the National Gallery helps us to reconstruct the appearance of the Château of Steen ; it shows us the tower and the crow-stepped gables sharply outlined against a sky illumined by the rays of the setting sun. Not to mention the masterly aspect of the autumnal effect, the figures that enliven the picture have a particular interest. Besides a two-horsed cart, on which a peasant woman is seated, and a hunter who creeps towards a covey of partridges lying low in the neighbouring furrows, we see Rubens himself with Helena and one of their children in the arms of its



nurse. The scene is delightful, and the painting, brushed in with masterly spirit, exhales the impression of blissful calm that spreads itself over the country at the close of a fine day. In the midst of these peaceful influences of Nature, the artist tasted to the full the sweetness of a life that was new to him, a life the innermost delights of which were gradually revealed to him.

But if the Château of Steen has preserved nothing of its ancient appearance, the surrounding country is unchanged, that wide, pleasant



THE TOURNAMENT.  
(The Louvre.)

landscape, open, fertile and well-watered, of varied cultivation and vast horizons, with its numerous avenues and plantations, which seen from a distance give the illusion of stretches of forest. Such as it is, this country certainly lacks character; but perhaps on that very account it was the more pleasing to Rubens. His interpretations of it, when compared with reality, help us to understand better what was his ideal, what secret instinct he obeyed in his choice of subjects, what features of that simple and modest nature seemed to him most worthy of record. The pleasure he found at this period of his career in painting

these landscapes is sufficiently proved by their number and importance. Almost all of them remained in his studio and figure in the inventory drawn up after his death.

It is, however, necessary to separate the works in this style that he then painted into two distinct classes, for some of them are pure compositions unconnected with the country in which the painter lived. It might be said indeed, that in the midst of these level plains his imagination called up the most hilly places that he had seen in his travels. Steep mountains, frowning rocks, rushing cascades or torrents, temples and buildings, details, picturesque, but often incongruous, and grouped together without the slightest probability, form the habitual scenes of episodes for which he was indebted to the study of his favourite poets. There is, for example, the *Aeneas in the Storm*, which formed part of the collection of the Duc de Richelieu and in which de Piles mistakenly believed that he recognised the environs of Porto Venere! or again, the *Ulysses among the Phæacians*,<sup>1</sup> to which he gave the equally gratuitous title of *A View of Cadiz*, and which seems to us rather to have been inspired by recollections of Tivoli. As if such an accumulation of details did not suffice, Rubens added the disturbances of the elements to the perilous incoherence of his landscapes. In the *Philemon and Baucis* at Vienna, it seemed as if he wished to heap up every sort of horror; the storm opening the flood-gates of Heaven; the flood, the foaming waves of which carry up-rooted trees, animals and human corpses. But in spite of the richness of invention that these complicated compositions show, their theatrical setting scarcely impresses us and we cannot congratulate Rubens on having given some vogue to so-called academic landscape in its most conventional and artificial form by the vigour with which he treated it.

In the landscapes directly inspired by Nature, on the other hand, Rubens shows all the originality to be expected from his genius, and his impressions are individual to himself and very different from those of the professional landscape-painters of his time. As Delacroix

<sup>1</sup> This also belonged to the Duc de Richelieu, and is now in the Pitti,

remarks, "specialists who have only one style are often inferior to those who, embracing everything from a higher standpoint, bring into that style an unaccustomed grandeur, even if they lack the same perfection in the details: to wit, Rubens and Titian in their landscapes." Without troubling himself about what was being done around him, the master tried to express everything in Nature that struck him. But although he respected to some extent the simplicity of the motives that presented themselves to him, he by no means copied them exactly. Almost unconsciously he mingled in them something of his epic sense in order to enlarge and transfigure them. The lines are more animated, the masses have more breadth, the distances, very vast in reality, stretch in his hand to infinity. In the abundance and variety of the forms, in the movement of the clouds, in the trembling of the trees, in the generous sap that swells the plants, opens the flowers or spreads the masses of foliage, we feel an indescribable breath of fertility, a vivifying warmth that fertilises the earth. It is no longer an inanimate slice of Nature cut haphazard from the landscape; it is not a lifeless portrait of the country, but an epitome of all its energies, all its wealth; in these vigorous works the artist has voluntarily neglected what is unimportant in order to give greater prominence to what is truly expressive.

Interesting as they are in themselves, each of these pictures has its own significance as part of a series in which the most characteristic aspects of the landscape are reproduced, varied according to the site, the weather, the time of day, and the succession of agricultural operations brought about by the seasons. Already, in a painting executed some years before—*The Stable*, now at Windsor<sup>1</sup>—Rubens had set himself to represent winter. The bare trees and the white shroud that covers the earth form a gloomy outlook; the animation of the foreground contrasts with the apparent death of nature. Under the shed which occupies the front part of the composition, the artist has

<sup>1</sup> The picture was painted before 1627, for it was included in the purchase of Rubens's collections by the Duke of Buckingham. Among the villagers grouped about a lighted fire occurs the type of the *Old Woman with the Brasier* in the Dresden Gallery, painted about 1622-3.

assembled all the persons and details of rural labour; horses, a young colt to which its mother gives suck, cows ranged in their stalls with a woman milking one of them, a barking dog, two busy servants moving about, villagers warming themselves at a fire, and near by in most agreeable confusion, carts, implements, all the appurtenances of a farm. In this very complicated scene the absolute accuracy of the values testifies to Rubens's thorough knowledge. With his clear comprehension of the possibilities and proprieties of his art, the master, desirous of depicting falling snow, knew that he could



THE RETURN FROM THE FIELDS.

(The Pitti.)

not spread the flakes uniformly over the whole of his picture without producing a disastrous effect of monotony. In relegating the flakes to the background, where they fall softly through the air, and in thus restricting the space they occupy, he well expressed his intention, and produced a work full of contrasts, at once true to nature and most pictorial.

But it was above all summer, with its fertility and splendour that Rubens loved, and he painted it in a large number of landscapes, the subjects of which were furnished by the neighbourhood of Steen, and

which consequently date from the latter part of his career. In the *Cows* of the Munich Gallery, a dozen of these fine animals, which two peasant women are occupied in milking, stand at the edge of a pool shaded by tall trees. Careless and well-fed, they are grouped in the most varied attitudes; and de Piles, who rightly praises this picture, assures us that the correct drawing of these animals "testifies that they were carefully copied from life." The *Return from*



MILKING-TIME.  
(Munich Gallery.)

*the Fields* in the Pitti is more broadly treated, and is of greater interest. Under a sky already coloured by the setting sun, the great Flemish plain stretches to the blue horizon with its woods, meadows, and fields of varied cultivation, a few villages half hidden in trees, and the silhouette of Mechlin dominated by the steeple of St. Rombaut. The sun, which is about to set, lights up the country with its dying rays. There is movement on every side: carts are being loaded with hay; horses are grazing; a flock of sheep is

entering the village, the dogs are hurrying up the loiterers ; a cart is drawn by two horses, on one of which sits a peasant ; women are carrying vegetables or fodder or holding rakes in their hands ; a farmer gives them orders ;—everywhere a picture of activity which, just when it is about to cease with the close of day, seems to reanimate the whole landscape for a moment. And yet in the midst of this renewed activity, we feel, as it were, the influence of on-coming night, and the vague scent of new-mown hay slowly rises, and fills the cool air with its penetrating fragrance.

Very different, but perhaps even more true to life is the impression made by the *Landscape with a Rainbow*. There are examples of different dimensions, both by the hand of the master, in the Wallace Collection and the Munich Gallery. Here again summer displays all its wealth of colour. The gold of the ripe corn is set off by the green of the meadows, the splendour of which the rain has just revived, and the tops of the trees, lighted up by the sun, stand out brilliantly against the dark clouds where the rainbow describes its great curve. As in the preceding picture, the generous fertility of the earth is everywhere expressed with masterly power in this healthy and robust painting. In the presence of this resplendent calm restored to the earth after a storm, we involuntarily think of the hymn of thanksgiving and joy which follows the last rumblings of the storm in the *Pastoral Symphony*.

In the importance that he attaches to the changing aspects of the sky, Rubens was truly an innovator. No one before him had dreamed of representing the incessant transformations of the clouds. It is not merely the fall of snow or the appearance of a rainbow after storm that he paints ; all the phenomena of light, all the disturbances of the atmosphere attracted his attention in turn, and tempted his brush. In a landscape belonging to Sir W. Wynn he shows us the sun's rays filtering through the trees of a forest, which a hunter with his pack of hounds traverses at daybreak in pursuit of game. Another time, he paints the close of day, as in the *Cart in the Mud* in the Hermitage,



XXXVIII

*Autumn.*

(NATIONAL GALLERY.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)





Printed by G. P. S. Paris, France

L. A. G. Paris, France



where the waggoners try to pull their cart out of the ruts in which it is stuck. The men are hurrying because the road is difficult, and night is coming on. Already, in an opening among the trees which crown the neighbouring rocks, the moon can be seen rising above the horizon, and mingling its vague gleams with the twilight. This mysterious hour, for which the landscape-painters of our own time show so strong a predilection, had never inspired the artists of Rubens's day, but he expressed its vague poetry with exquisite charm. Very rarely, too, had any one before him dared as he did in the *Moonlight* at Dudley House, to treat the august quietude of a starry night, its uncertain glimmer, its solitude and its silence scarcely broken by the wandering footfalls of a horse grazing in the foreground. More original still is the impression of the little *Landscape with a Fowler* in the Louvre, in which the sun, breaking through the morning mists, scatters and absorbs the silvery vapours that float above the water, while all nature awakes, penetrated with light and freshness.

In all these landscapes, figures and animals, of great animation, and always placed in the most advantageous position, complete the individuality of each work, or by a few striking touches, such as the pale yellow of a cow, the white of a horse, or the bright blue or red of a petticoat, raise the general tonality. There are, for instance, in the *Morning* of the Louvre, some men sawing a tree, a fowler with his net spread, a horseman and two ladies half hidden in the bushes, waiting to catch sparrows flying in their direction. Sometimes, as in the *Landscape with a Flock of Sheep*, belonging to the Earl of Carlisle, the master, desirous of emphasising the wildness of the spot, puts in only a single figure, that of a shepherd leaning on his crook, surrounded by his little flock. But more generally, his temperament leads him to multiply the figures in his picturesque compositions. In another *Landscape with a Rainbow*, of which there are examples in the Louvre and the Hermitage, slightly different, the foreground is occupied by a tall fellow with long hair, who lies on the ground and gazes tenderly at a broad-shouldered fair-haired girl, who leans amor-

ously against him, while not far off, near another pair of lovers, a shepherd prepares to play his rustic flute. While the execution of these two pictures denotes an earlier period, the landscape with its steep hills seems to be a recollection of Italy, a Flemish adaptation as it were, of well-known works by Giorgione or Titian. But we find the outline of Steen in the Vienna Gallery in a rather risky scene cleverly drawn on an oblong panel scarcely covered with pale tones. It is probably one of the *Gardens of Love* painted by Rubens at this time. Gay and gallant cavaliers pursue or dally with elegantly dressed ladies in a meadow in sight of the *château*. A little apart, a more sedate couple watch their sport, and, with M. Max Rooses, we fancy we recognise in them Helena, richly dressed, a fan in her hand, still young and attractive, and her gouty husband, who can only drag himself along by the aid of the stick on which he leans. But more probably we should regard this as a purely imaginative work, for were it taken from life, it would give us a somewhat strange idea of the visitors at Steen, and of the pastimes indulged in by them under the eyes of their hosts.

Neither was it reality alone that inspired Rubens in the *Dance of Villagers*, which figures in the catalogue of the Prado as *La Ronda*. The fantastic dresses, as well as the types of the dancers and the semi-Italian setting sufficiently prove this. At any rate, if he has drawn on his memory or his sketch-books for some of the elements of the episode, the artist has treated them very freely, obeying only his own caprices. The subject is most picturesque, and the eight couples of dancers—who for orchestra are satisfied with a rude shepherd's pipe blown by a musician perched among the branches of a tree—describe a very graceful curve in their spirited round. Bending low, the dancers pass under the arch formed by the handkerchiefs that two of the couples hold above their heads. Swept along by the rapid motion, two of them try to join hands again, while their companions clasp and embrace one another. The rhythmic arabesque formed by the groups is full of grace and joyous movement. But the original does not come up to the idea given by photographs of the picture. The

greenish blues of the trees and distances set off, it is true, the freshness and brilliance of the flesh-tints, and here and there some of the details are delightful. But two somewhat coarse blues, and a slightly opaque red in the draperies make a disagreeable discord in the general effect, and the execution has neither the firmness nor the intelligence to be expected from Rubens when painting such a scene at this period of his life.



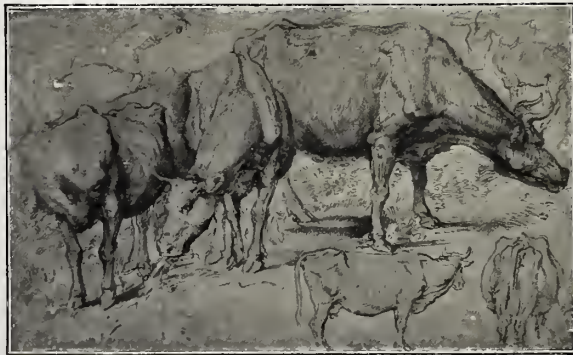
THE RAIN-BOW.  
(Munich Gallery.)

But, on the other hand, the *Kermesse* of the Louvre with its amazing vitality, its attractive colour, the expressive force of the execution, is one of the great artist's masterpieces. His interest in all frank manifestations of life doubtless led him to look on at the village *fêtes* held at Steen or in its neighbourhood, of which he here gives us an almost too realistic picture. A peasant's life is neither easy nor prodigal. When, however, anything occurs to interrupt the regular course of his work, such as a marriage, a christening, or even

a funeral, the most frugal becomes lavish, and the most sober abandons himself without restraint to his appetites. It is really necessary to have seen a Flemish fair to understand how a naturally industrious and peaceful people can, at certain times, break out into licence and show a certain brutal effrontery in the pursuit of gross pleasures. The spectacle of such excesses greatly struck strangers, and in a letter to his brother, Philip IV., from Antwerp, on August 26, 1639, the Archduke Ferdinand mentioned the scandals of a *Kermesse* at which he had been present, "everybody eating and drinking till they were completely intoxicated, for this is the necessary end of all holidays in this country. It is certain that they live at present just like beasts." The Louvre picture shows us an epitome, as it were, of the excitement, gluttony, drunkenness and lust incidental to such fêtes. The holiday which is celebrated in this scandalous fashion has already lasted too long, and the calm landscape which serves as a background to its final excesses seems to protest against the prolongation of such debaucheries. The peaceful outline of the neighbouring village with its modest steeple stands out against the soft clear sky; different forms of cultivation are displayed on the slopes of a hill where a shepherd tends his flock; hard by, harvesters bind the corn in sheaves. But if sensible persons have resumed their usual work, the excited holiday-makers will not yet desist, and freed from all restraint, they abandon themselves to their frenzy. It is no longer pleasure; it is madness. Without troubling about his neighbour, each one shows himself as he is, and every kind of temperament is revealed in the paroxysms of folly. Professed drunkards, besotted, angry or maudlin, having already drunk too much, are still drinking; farther off a tumultuous crowd of brawlers argue, gesticulate, and embrace one another; women baring their breasts give their children suck, while others receive or provoke the assaults of drunken boors. In the midst of this disorder, and of the discordant shouts that mingle with the strident notes of a bagpipe, the lascivious dance goes on its shameless course, hands straying, lips seeking one another, bodies quivering, bending and twisting. Impelled

by a lewd contagion, the strongest of the boors lift their massive partners into the air, and it is impossible to describe the equivocal postures, doubtful attitudes and shameless gestures the eye can discover in this flood of bestiality. Nevertheless, repugnant and disgusting as is a scene that far outstrips the audacities and rascalities depicted by Ostade, or Steen, or Teniers, or Brauwer, the work is of unique value in its feverish passion, in conception, and its execution. Despite the complexity of detail, the general arrangement of the composition is superb. Spread out towards the left, it seems to rest all its weight on the frame, gradually lengthening out and thinning off until it disappears into the landscape. The distribution of the groups corresponds with the animated rhythm of the silhouette, and in the groups themselves the diversity of the action harmonises with the character of the scene. Although a work like this seems altogether spontaneous, Rubens carefully prepared it; after deciding the arrangement of the whole composition in its main lines, he studied the principal details in several drawings. He painted it on panel, which he generally preferred to canvas, fixing the contours with a firm line, gradually elaborating precise indications of all the figures, and seeking next to establish the general effect by vigorous accents, broad lights, or soft, transparent half-tones. Arrived at this point without haste or hesitation, he pressed the prepared surface on which he was working into his service, laying on his colours frankly, and neither fusing them nor tormenting them over-much, leaving some dull and pale, others bright and pure, with that sense of broad decorative effect, of happy contrasts and harmonies that give this rustic Bacchanalian scene the appearance of a great bouquet of wild flowers. Lastly, the execution must be mentioned; it is, in this picture, more wonderful than ever, vigorous and supple in turn, here gliding over the ground, there pressing on it, here expeditious; there caressing, with a perfect spontaneity never possessed in like degree by any other master. To the exquisite charm of such workmanship must be added the perfect knowledge of a master delighting in his art, learned in all its resources. The marvellous result teaches us what a subject

for observation and study a work like this affords a painter. It is not therefore surprising that despite the licentious and disgusting scenes it portrays, it is at every point worthy of its author. Although for once, Rubens permitted himself to stray into this compromising society, his talent remained that of the high-bred, distinguished man, always elegant and refined, so much so that Watteau, assuredly a good judge in such matters, not content with admiring the *Kermesse*, copied several fragments of it, and was more than once inspired by it. We feel impelled to ask how such coarse things could be described in such refined language; how a picture so well calculated to provoke censure and disgust has managed to defy criticism. We begin even to doubt the propriety of the severe strictures that men of taste pass on works in which realism runs riot. But genius alone may venture on such audacities; and where men of mere talent are justly condemned, Rubens is not only to be pardoned, but to be admired for the inexhaustible variety of aptitudes and gifts of which this new phase is a further proof.



STUDY OF COWS.

(The Duke of Devonshire. Chatsworth.)





THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS.  
(The Prado.)

## CHAPTER X

LAST LETTERS OF RUBENS TO PEIRESC—PHILIP IV. COMMISSIONS RUBENS TO DECORATE THE TORRE DE LA PARADA—THE "JUDGMENT OF PARIS"—THE "THREE GRACES"—OTHER PICTURES PAINTED AT THIS PERIOD—THE "MARTYRDOM OF ST. ANDREW"—THE "HORRORS OF WAR"—THE "MARTYRDOM OF ST. PETER"—PORTRAIT OF RUBENS IN OLD AGE—LAST VISIT TO STEEN—RETURN TO ANTWERP—THE ARTIST'S COURAGE DURING HIS ILLNESS—HIS WILL—HIS DEATH (MAY 30, 1640).



PLATE FROM THE DRAWING-BOOK.  
(Engraving by P. Pontius after Rubens.)

ALTHOUGH the quiet life of Steen was so beneficial to Rubens's health, he was not able to remain there for long periods at a time. Many reasons called for his presence at Antwerp. Not to mention the commissions he undertook, and the cares that devolved on him, he was occupied by politics, sincerely as he wished to break off all connection with them. He had taken so intimate a part in certain affairs of state, his intelligence and his devotion were so well known, that he could not refuse the advice, and sometimes the more active assistance that the governors

asked of him. The position of Spain became more difficult every day. The king of France had openly declared himself on the side of the United Provinces, and a body of French troops carrying aid to the Dutch had recently inflicted a crushing defeat on Prince Thomas de Carignan. Under these circumstances the correspondence which Rubens had just resumed with Peiresc ran great risk of fresh interruptions. The artist bitterly deplored the situation in a letter to his friend from Antwerp, dated May 31, 1635. "The rupture between the two crowns is at an acute stage, to my great distress, for I am by nature and inclination the determined enemy of all public or private disputes, contests, and quarrels." Rubens's horror of war was increased at this juncture by the vexations entailed on him by his defence of the privilege granted for the sale of his engravings in France. He gained his cause in the courts, it is true, and he begged Peiresc to indemnify all who had been put to expense on his account during the law-suit. But his adversaries did not consider themselves beaten. Emboldened doubtless by the rupture between France and Spain, they raised difficulties which Rubens could not understand, "for he knew nothing whatever of chicanery, and the question was so simple that he thought the decision of the Court of Parliament would have been effectual and would have made appeal impossible. . . . He did not know if the privilege granted by his Majesty was valid in time of war, and if all the trouble taken to obtain and uphold the decision of the Courts would not be fruitless. Such, however, was not the case in the United Provinces; there, even in time of war, such privileges were inviolable." But Rubens feared most of all a fresh interruption to the correspondence in which he found so great a relief from his anxieties, "through no fault of mine," he added, "but because you are too well known, and hold too important an office to carry on the correspondence without risk of suspicion; I must bow to necessity, whatever it may cost me, in order to assure your peace and safety." Rubens wrote again to Peiresc on August 16. "I should not dare to write to you in such disturbed times, if the two crowns were not once more exchanging letters, so that the courier arrives from Paris as usual;



*Study for the "Garden of Love" in the Prado.*

(THE LOUVRE.)



Printed by Draeger, Paris.



besides your lordship expects a reply to your letter of June 19, which reached me two days ago."

Some details follow concerning the action against the authors of the piracies of his engravings. His 'adversaries' chief argument for the annulling of the privilege was "that he derived enormous sums from France for his engravings." He declared the statement "to be false, and that he would be glad to affirm on oath that he had never sent to France either directly or through a third person, any copies of his engravings, except those destined for the Royal Library, or offered as gifts to friends." Besides, he was anxious to come to terms with his adversaries, for he was a man of peace, and had as great a horror of chicanery and discussion as of the plague; he considered that to live in peace, free from public or private quarrel, and to do service to all without injuring any one, should be the chief desire of every gentleman. . . . "I regret," he continued, "that kings and princes do not think the same, for smaller men pay for their faults, *quiquid illi delirant, plectantur Achivi*. The situation here has altogether changed; from a defensive war we have passed to an offensive one, so that instead of having, as was the case a few weeks ago, 60,000 enemies in the heart of Brabant, we are now in like numbers, masters of the country." Rubens was astonished that two imposing armies, led by such famous generals, had only so far brought about paltry results, and he hoped that the intervention of the Pope, of the King of England, and above all of God, would preserve Europe from the general conflagration which threatened her, and which would end in her ruin. "But," he said, "let us leave the care of public affairs to those who direct them, and let us find consolation in discussing our *little trifles*." He then comments learnedly on the vases, the impressions of which he has received, and declares that he will soon return the box in which they were, full of objects not of equal value, but of equal number. In reply, doubtless, to Peiresc's questions, he mentioned the extraordinary scientific experiments of a Jesuit, Father Linus, then professor at Liège, and in connection with an optical problem which had probably also been

submitted to him by Peiresc, he declares that "he does not know as much about the subject as his correspondent thinks. He does not consider his observations on the matter worth writing down, but he will gladly tell him all that is in his mind, if only to amuse him with his ignorance."

In another letter to Peiresc, dated from Antwerp, March 16, 1636, Rubens apologised for not having replied as soon as he would have wished ; but he had been compelled much against his will, to spend a few days at Brussels on private business, and not, he adds, "on the errands that you imagine ; I declare this in all sincerity, begging you to trust my word. I confess that in the beginning I was asked to take part in affairs of this kind, but as I did not find it an occupation to my taste, and as difficulties were made about my passport, profiting by a diversion, not to say a tergiversation on my part ; as there are always plenty of persons eager to intervene on such occasions, I can continue to enjoy a quiet domestic life, with the favour of Heaven, and am quite content, and ready to serve you by remaining at home." He had much to say regarding the false and injurious interpretation put by his adversaries on the verdict against them in the affair of the privilege granted to his engravings ; but instead of enlarging on that, he preferred to give Peiresc what seemed to him the most likely explanation of an engraved stone with an antique landscape. He thought it represented a *Nymphæum*, that the painting was well executed, but suffered from the total absence of perspective found in the buildings drawn on engraved stones, even in the best period, for, in spite of Euclid's excellent teaching, the rules were not then as well known as they have gradually come to be. Rubens sent with the letter drawings of medals, and a copy of a bas-relief of the Trojan War, done by one of his pupils on the scale of the original, and hoped that Peiresc had already received his *Essay on Colour*. This little treatise from the pen of such a master would have been particularly valuable, and if it has not been destroyed, it may perhaps be found some day in one of the places in which papers belonging to the Provençal scholar have been discovered.



The following letter dated from Steen, September 4, 1636, is, as far as we know, the last written by Rubens to Peiresc. He again apologised for his long silence, which was not to be imputed to idleness, nor to a decrease of affection. "But he has been away from Antwerp for some months, living in an out of the way part of the country, far from high roads, where it is difficult either to receive letters or to send them." He had forgotten to take Peiresc's last letter, and the drawings received a few days before his departure, away with him, and so could



DIANA AND CALISTO.  
(The Prado.)

not reply as he would have wished ; but he will do so "immediately on his return to Antwerp, which will be, he hoped, in a few days." His obligations towards Peiresc were much increased by the sending of the coloured drawing he so greatly wished for, and the copy of the antique painting discovered at Rome in his youth, an unique work, and as such greatly admired by all lovers of painting and antique works of art. "Although it arrived without a letter," he said, "the handwriting of the address and the quality of the gift betrayed the author, and to speak the truth, you could not have made me a more welcome present, nor one more in harmony with my tastes and desires ; for although

the copyist's talent may not be first-rate, he has tried to reproduce the original faithfully, and he has succeeded well, both as regards colour and workmanship, so that I can at least recall a memory, if not effaced, at least somewhat dim after so many years." Rubens further assured Peiresc that all his collections were absolutely at his service. It might be useful to inform him that "in the place where the painting was discovered, numerous ancient coins, mostly of the time of the Antonines, were also found. . . . He had also forgotten to mention that before leaving Antwerp he saw a large book, entitled, *Roma Sotteranea*, which seemed to him a remarkable work, and of great interest from a religious point of view; it testified to the simplicity of the primitive Church, which though it was superior to all the religions of the world in piety and truth, was infinitely inferior to the old paganism in grace and beauty." He learnt also from letters from Rome that the Justinian Gallery had just been published at the expense of the Marquis Giustiniani. He heard that it was a valuable work, and he hoped to receive a copy in Flanders in a few months. But he has no doubt that all these new productions flow toward his friend's collection at their first appearance. The correspondence between these two cultured men ended with this letter. Peiresc died at Aix, a short time after, on May 24, 1637, without ever having had the pleasure of a visit from his illustrious friend.

But although Rubens delighted in this cordial exchange of ideas, his correspondence and the political business with which he was occasionally forced to deal, filled a very limited space in his life. He reserved the greater part of his time for the pursuit of his profession, and in spite of increasingly bad health, his last years were so abundantly productive that incessant labour undoubtedly hastened his end. The Archduke Ferdinand, anxious to attach him to his person, confirmed him in his office of Court Painter on April 15, 1636, and Rubens took the oath to his new master on June 13 following. The Infant knew little about painting, and no doubt took more interest in riding and hunting, and other exercises that had been the favourite pursuits of

his youth. In his letters to Philip IV., he continually complained that he could not enjoy in Flanders the pastimes that he had formerly shared with his brother; he asked him to describe the royal hunts, and sent him gifts of dogs, and Frisian horses. If pictures were often mentioned in the correspondence, from which Herr Justi has published valuable extracts,<sup>1</sup> it is because Ferdinand had to reply to his brother's urgent questions on the subject. The King of Spain had decided to adorn the hunting lodge of Torre de la Parada, which he had built near his residence of Buen-Retiro, about ten miles from Madrid, with paintings. The castle, which was seized and plundered in 1710 during the War of Succession, would be unknown to us even by name were it not for the pictures which once formed its decoration, nearly all of which are now in the Prado. Accustomed to satisfy his caprices immediately, the King determined to carry out his project without delay; and Rubens alone was capable of meeting his wishes. The King admired his talent, and having seen him at work, knew his ardour and facility. A short time before, twenty-five pictures had been sent to the Queen, Isabella de Bourbon, from Flanders by the master's directions, several of them by his own hand<sup>2</sup>: among others a *Diana Hunting*, a *Ceres and Pan* painted in collaboration with Snyder, and two canvases representing the *Five Senses*, painted some time before with Jan Brueghel's assistance. These works, which were at once hung in the dining-room, had revived the King's liking for the artist's productions. Accordingly in 1636 he put the whole of the decoration of Torre de la Parada into his hands. The plan had perhaps entered his mind at the time of Rubens's visit to Spain, for De Piles, usually accurately informed, tells us "that Philip IV. made him take the measures when he was at the court, to work at his convenience, when he reached home."<sup>3</sup>

The King himself suggested the subjects; they were to be taken

<sup>1</sup> *Diego Velazquez*, Vol. I. p. 397; Vol. II. p. 401.

<sup>2</sup> The pictures are mentioned in an inventory of the Royal Palaces drawn up in 1636.

<sup>3</sup> *Œuvres de De Piles*. Amsterdam, 1767. Vol. IV. p. 375.

from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, not only in order to give the artist's fancy free play, but so that nothing in the retreat chosen by the sovereign, should recall the conventions of the court and the anxieties from which he desired to escape. Ovid was then in great favour both in Spain and Flanders, and as Herr Justi observes "there was no *fête* in which Olympus, Parnassus, or Diana's sacred wood did not figure on the stage of Buen Retiro."<sup>1</sup> Decoration had to be provided for twelve large rooms on the first floor, and eight on the ground floor. As it was to be finished in the shortest possible time, Rubens could not accomplish such a vast undertaking without assistance. It was therefore arranged that he should paint the sketches for all the compositions, and entrust their execution to other artists chosen by him, while reserving the subjects he preferred to treat for his own brush. The master selected as collaborators ten Antwerp painters: his friends, Jordaens, C. de Vos and Snyders; his pupils, Erasmus Quellin, Van Thulden, J. Van Eyck, J. P. Gouwi, J. Cossiers, J. B. Borrekens, and Th. Willeborts. The Infant informed the King in a letter from Douai, November 30, 1636, that Rubens had begun the work, and that on his return to Brussels he would tell him of its progress; he would push on its completion as fast as he could. From this time forth, the Archduke refers to the matter in every letter to his brother. Wherever he might be, at Brussels, at the various places to which his warlike operations took him, at Antwerp, whither he went on purpose to see Rubens, he sent the King details about the pictures, the delays that prevented their completion, the best mode for their transport, since the rupture with France often made communication difficult, and the necessary passports had to be obtained from the Venetian ambassador in Paris. Philip IV. showed the utmost impatience, and Ferdinand, urged by him to hasten the work, declared that he found the artists too slow, "too phlegmatic . . . and much less expeditious than Velazquez." He wished them at least to fix dates for the delivery of the pictures. Rubens politely defended himself; he declared that he would do his best to please the

<sup>1</sup> *Diego Velazquez*, Vol. I. p. 399.

King, and would lose no time; but he had to reckon with his gout, the attacks of which became more frequent and more painful, and in spite of his courage, sometimes prevented him from working. Under these circumstances, he had to stimulate his collaborators, and expend his strength when he greatly needed rest, just as he had done in the case of the decorations for the Archduke's triumphal entry into Antwerp. When the pictures were finished it was necessary to wait until they were dry, and to resist the Cardinal, who wanted to despatch them at once. Ferdinand grumbled, but was forced to submit to the artist's objections, for, as he naïvely said, "He is more competent to judge in such matters than I." The weather was unfavourable, "it was a miracle if the sun shone," and the pictures, finished on January 21, 1638, were not despatched until March 11 following. Other paintings from Flanders were sent at the same time, and a gentleman of



THE DEAD CHRIST LAMENTED BY THE HOLY WOMEN.  
(Berlin Museum.)

Ferdinand's household accompanied them across France, reaching Madrid at the end of April.

In order to rouse his collaborators' emulation, Rubens, contrary to his usual custom, allowed them to claim the paternity of their works, and they now figure under their names in the Prado. The sketches he hurriedly drew for them testify to his desire to leave more latitude than usual to his assistants. Not only are they generally small, but

they lack the precision he usually gave to works of the kind. They were formerly all together in the collections of the Duke d'Osuna and the Duke de Pastrana at Madrid. When these were broken up, the sketches were scattered in various public and private collections, and are now to be found in the Brussels and Berlin Museums, in the collections of Mme. Ed. André, the Count de Valencia, &c. Pressed for time, Rubens did not hesitate to borrow figures, or even groups, from his Italian reminiscences, and his own earlier works. But instead of rigorously fixing the forms, he left his drawings vague, and he seems chiefly to have aimed at a picturesque silhouette and pleasing colour. The sketches, of which the best are, perhaps, *Atalanta's Race*, *Cephalus and Procris*, *Diana and Endymion*, and *Cupid riding a Dolphin*, are notable for their freshness, and for the charm and lightness of the execution. It is impossible to imagine their beauty from the dull, insignificant productions for which they served as models. Indeed, even the paintings executed by Rubens himself cannot be reckoned among his best works; they were: "the *Battle between the Lapithæ and the Centaurs*, the *Rape of Proserpine*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *Jupiter and Juno*, *Mercury and Argus*, and the *Banquet of Tereus*. They too clearly betray hurried work, and in all probability were only retouched by him. But, as Herr Justi remarks, the decoration, to some extent improvised and destined for a simple hunting lodge, ought to be judged as a whole, and by the general effect. The courtiers who were to see them at the Torre de la Parada, amid their sport, would not, have been able to appreciate more studied, chastened, or delicate works. The subjects chosen were in harmony with their setting, and Rubens never painted anything more horrible than the *Banquet of Tereus*, or *Saturn devouring his Children*, omitting none of the repulsive details that such episodes include. The entanglements of arms and legs in the left-hand portion of the *Battle of the Lapithæ* is equally unattractive, and it would be easy to point out many vulgarities and faults of taste in these compositions. But the spirit and animation that the artist put into them give to the general effect the contrasts and harmonies that were the chief essentials of this work,



XXXIX

*Helena Fourment and Her Children.*

(THE LOUVRE.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)





Philippe de Champaigne

Printed by Gény-Gros, Paris, France



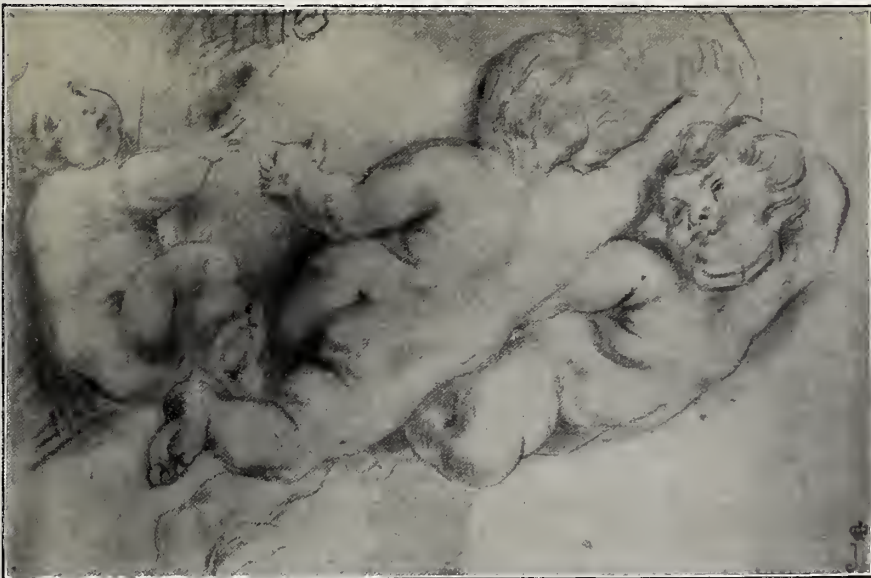
brushed in with the utmost haste, for it scarcely took more than a year. The King, in any case, was satisfied, for he at once commissioned eighteen more pictures from Rubens to complete the decoration of the castle, and a further sum of 10,000 florins was allotted him. Snyders was at the same time commissioned to paint hunting pieces for the remaining empty spaces.

The Archduke Ferdinand wrote to the king from Antwerp on June 30, 1638, that he had given the commission to Rubens who "in order to gain time, would paint all the pictures with his hand. . . . But at that moment he was suffering much from gout. He had not been able to finish the *Judgment of Paris* (which formed part of the earlier commission), but it was well on the way." In letters dated from Brussels July 20 and December 11 following, the Infant again apologised for the non-completion of the pictures, the delay being caused by the repeated attacks of gout from which Rubens suffered. At length, on February 27, 1639, Ferdinand informed his brother that the *Judgment of Paris* was about to be despatched to Spain, but that owing to its large size (6 ft. 6·74 in. by 12 ft. 5·606 in.) it could not be sent by the ordinary methods of transport. He added "that in the opinion of all the painters it was Rubens's best work. I have only one fault to find with it, for which I could not obtain any redress from him : the excessive nudity of the three goddesses ; the artist replied that therein lay the merit of the picture. The Venus who occupies the central place is a very good likeness of the painter's wife, the most beautiful of all the ladies of Antwerp." The worthy Cardinal had to conduct curious discussions in which scant attention was paid to his timid observations. The complacent display of nudities, at which he had some cause to feel scandalised, was entirely to his brother's taste, and with a complete absence of conjugal modesty the artist, on his side, continued to take the public into his confidence regarding his young wife. In representing her as Venus, Rubens, as much in love with her as ever, seized an excellent opportunity for awarding her a prize for beauty at the hands of Paris. Save for the legs, which with their swollen knees are vulgar enough, Helena's figure has more

distinction and has grown more slender. The two other goddesses present the same types of face, the same supple attitudes, the same fresh flesh-tints, with unimportant differences. We should, however, search in vain for a positive likeness to Helena in a *Judgment of Paris* of smaller dimensions in the National Gallery, painted about this time with some notable modifications. The admirable little copy in the Dresden Gallery recalls by the finish of the touch the copy of the *Garden of Love* belonging to Baron Edmond de Rothschild, and is, in our opinion, by the same hand. Helena does not seem to have furnished the model for any of the female figures in the *Pregnancy of Calisto* in the Prado. It was, however, painted at this period, and in all probability was the companion picture to the *Judgment of Paris*, for its height is the same; if it differs in breadth it is because so little respect was formerly shown for works of art that an important piece was cut away from the left side of the canvas, as is shown by the dog near Diana, of which we see only the end of the nose and one of the paws. With the exception of the nymph stooping down and seen from behind, who displays her exuberant rotundity in the foreground, the figures are charming, especially the guilty nymph, who, all ashamed, is led by her companions to Diana, and the goddess herself, who, with a gesture of surprise and authority, orders them to remove Calisto's clothing. The vigorous tones of the woods that form the setting of the scene, the neutral blues of the sky and a few brighter colours scattered here and there, set off the brilliant flesh-tints of the nymphs, whose types Rubens has here done his best to vary.

But Helena seems to us to have supplied the model for a superb study painted entirely by the master's hand, which hangs in the Prado under the name of the *Three Graces*. It represents three nude young women, of plump contours, alike in build, very nearly alike in features, and differing only in the colour of their hair—fair, dark brown, and reddish brown. They are standing side by side; the central one is seen from behind, the other two in profile; their bodies stand out boldly against the sky, and against a landscape background in which

stags and herds are feeding at ease. A dark green drapery hangs on the left, while on the right the waters of a fountain fall into a basin; above are climbing roses, and the turf is dotted with different kinds of flowers. The artist reproduced the beauties and imperfections of the young model who posed for the three figures with absolute fidelity. The fair one most resembles Helena, and is the most beautiful; her naïve pose is delightful, revealing with all the *sangfroid* of a young animal the shimmering flesh, the pearly whiteness of which forms a



CHILDREN BEARING A SPHERE.  
(The Hermitage.)

tender and exquisite harmony with the blue sky. If the somewhat startling realism oversteps admitted conventions, the supple modelling, and the fresh colour enchant a painter's eye; they testify to the grace and infinite seduction which Rubens could give to these faithful reproductions of nature. To excuse the husband who was thus lavish of indiscreet confidences concerning his wife, we ought to add that, as was the case with other works of the kind, the master painted the study for himself, and kept it in his private collection till his death. Still more legitimate scruples prevented his widow from including it

in the sale of his effects. But its realism attracted Philip IV.'s attention, and the morose and gallant monarch's fondness for such exhibitions made him assure himself of its possession. Let us hope that the worthy Cardinal, so often forced by his brother to take part in negotiations that must have been a little compromising to his dignity, was not this time obliged to serve as intermediary in the purchase.

Rubens painted such works for his own pleasure, and, as it were, renewed his talent by such direct studies from nature. But besides the numerous works to be executed without delay for the King of Spain, he had also to accomplish other important commissions brought him by his fame. P. Rambrecht, an Antwerp merchant living at Madrid, commissioned him to paint a large picture for the hospital of the Flemings, founded in that town in 1594, on the subject of the *Martyrdom of St. Andrew*, the patron saint of the hospital. The arrangement of the scene bears some analogy to that of the *Coup de Lance*. While the executioners are employed in adjusting the last cords that fasten the victim to the cross, pitying women vainly try to soften the heart of the officer who presides over the preparations for the execution. One of them, with fair hair, whose features recall those of Helena, kneeling in the foreground, stretches her arms imploringly towards the officer; his gestures seem to indicate that he is only carrying out his orders, and cannot consequently pay any heed to her entreaties. The Saint, indifferent to what is passing around him, his eyes raised to Heaven, awaits death with an air of resignation and faith. The effect of the scene, which stands out very clearly against a gloomy sky, is striking, and the different groups of figures arranged in the composition, testify in the accuracy of the respective spaces between them to that exact determination of the planes which was the result of Rubens's perfect knowledge. It is difficult to appreciate the handling by reason of the darkness of the recently-built chapel (Calle Claudio Coello) in which the large canvas hangs above the high altar.

Rubens also received a commission for a large picture, doubtless

intended for the Duke of Tuscany, through the intervention of a compatriot living at Florence, Joost Sustermans, the portrait-painter, a pupil of Pourbus, then very much esteemed in Italy. The choice of subject was left to the artist, who, true to his love of peace, suggested an allegorical scene representing the *Horrors of War*. His proposal was agreed to, and the master, anxious to send a work worthy of him to Italy, made two very careful sketches, the most notable of which is now in the National Gallery, and the other in the collection left by M. Eud. Marcille. On March 12, he informed Sustermans that the picture for which he had just received payment had been despatched. It is now in the Pitti. As the German high roads were then somewhat unsafe, and very crowded owing to the military operations of which the country was at that time the centre, he found it more prudent to send it by Lille and through France. By his correspondent's desire, Rubens sent at the same time a detailed explanation of the picture. The beginning and end of this long commentary will be sufficient to show the ultra-refined subtleties of the work. "The principal figure is Mars, who, issuing from the open temple of Janus (which, according to the Roman custom was closed in time of peace), marches forward with a shield and bloody sword, threatening the people with great misfortunes. He pays scant heed to Venus, who, accompanied by Cupids, tries to keep him back by her caresses and kisses. On the other side, Mars is drawn forward by the Fury Alecto, who holds a torch in her hand. . . ." After complacently enlarging on the numerous details symbolising the evils of war, Rubens ends by explaining the meaning of a despairing woman with up-lifted arms—an evident reminiscence of the figure in the centre of the *Massacre of the Innocents*, painted a short time before. "This mourning woman, dressed in black, her veil rent, despoiled of her jewels and ornaments, is unhappy Europe, who has suffered for such long years from rapine, outrage, and misfortunes, the ravages of which defy description. Her attribute is the globe borne by a little angel or genius, surmounted by the cross to signify the Christian world." Rubens might have spared him-

self this long commentary, for the meaning of the composition is sufficiently clear, and its beauty lies not in these complex significations, but in the simplicity of a conception realised by purely pictorial means. Instead of the literary rebuses too much favoured by the intellectual *dilettanti* of the period, it represents with charming forms and pleasing colours the works of peace, opposed by a natural contrast to the gloomy, horrible personifications of war, in a work full of life and movement. The idea of this contrast in dealing with such a subject was elementary enough, but only the seductive genius of a Rubens could have treated it in such a fashion, only he could have animated the God of War with such fury, and have made him, quivering and irresistible, tear himself from the arms of his despairing mistress, to carry death and desolation through the world. In the postscript of his letter to Sustermans, Rubens, practical as ever, reminds him, as he had reminded Peiresc, of the precautions, "familiar no doubt, to a man so eminent in his profession," necessary to repair the injuries that a new painting might have suffered from being long kept in a case, which may have caused "its brilliance to become dimmed, especially in the flesh or the whites, which may have become slightly yellow." It would regain all its brilliance if occasionally exposed to the sun, and he authorised his colleague to repair any damage it might have suffered with his own hand.

Another commission entrusted to Rubens about the same time through the intermediary of a German painter, named Georg Geldorp, who lived in London, awoke still older memories than those of Italy. The work was destined for the town of Cologne. Pressed for time, the master wrote to Geldorp from Antwerp on July 25, 1657, begging him "to grant him a respite of a year and a half in order that he might give more time to the work. He would much like to treat the subject of the *Martyrdom of St. Peter*, with the saint crucified head downwards, and he would do his very best, for he had preserved the liveliest affection for Cologne, where he had lived until he was ten years old." A little less than a year after, April 2, 1658, Rubens asked Geldorp to



warn the friend for whom he had acted as intermediary, that he must have a little patience, the picture “was well advanced, and he hoped to make it one of the best things he had ever painted,” but he required a little leisure to finish it satisfactorily. The famous banker, Everard Jabach, for whom it was probably destined, died before the *Martyrdom of St. Peter* was completed. The picture remained in Rubens’s possession, and was purchased from his heirs for 1,200 florins, “by G. Deschamps, agent for a resident of Cologne,” that is, by the order of



THE HORRORS OF WAR.  
(The Pitti.)

Jabach’s family, who, in memory of him, placed it in 1642 above the high altar in the Church of St. Peter at Cologne, where it now is. In spite of his assurances, made undoubtedly in good faith, the work does not rank among Rubens’s masterpieces. If, as says Delacroix, who is never sparing in his praises of Rubens, “the saint is magnificent. . . .” and if he draws attention to “the supreme beauty of the legs, torso, and head,” he is forced to acknowledge that “the other figures are very weak, and that he soon had enough of them.” The master’s collaborators evidently had a large share in the execution of the work, as well as in that of another large canvas (12 feet, 5·606 inches, by 7 feet, 8·51

inches), the *Martyrdom of St. Thomas*, which the Countess Hélène Martinitz presented at the same time to the Church of St. Thomas at Prague, where it was hung in 1639 in the place it still occupies. The composition is full of spirit and animation, and the desperate ferocity of the executioners who stone or stab the saint embracing the cross by which he had taken refuge, forms an admirable contrast to the victim's serenity and sublime resignation. But throughout certain signs of carelessness, of which Delacroix speaks, testify to the large share of Rubens's collaborators in the work.

How, indeed, could it have been otherwise? How could the artist himself have accomplished commissions of such importance, together with the numerous works he had in hand for the King of Spain, when age and disease made him feel more and more the gradual decrease of his strength? The half-length portrait of himself, painted at this period, a masterpiece now in the Vienna Gallery, the arrangement of which is boldly indicated in the fine drawing in the Louvre, shows with unflinching veracity the changes that the last years had wrought in his appearance. The brilliant cavalier of the Windsor, Aix, and Florence portraits has disappeared, and Rubens no longer tries, as in the first days of his marriage with Helena, to delude himself about his age. He was now over sixty. He is dressed plainly but elegantly, and the figure with its noble pose is still lordly enough. It is the portrait of a statesman, a great nobleman, the owner of the manor of Steen. The bearing is stately, the complexion is still ruddy; yet the face has grown slightly paler, and the eyes, though still kindly and keen, have lost their brightness, and their expression has a certain sadness. The skin is relaxed, and, as it were, softened, the nose has grown sharper; the fingers of the bare hand resting on the rapier are deformed by gout. The intelligent, sweet expression is that of a man who has greatly suffered, who knows the worst, and seems to say so, with that air of mingled enquiry and resignation we see on the faces of invalids. It is long before we can turn away from this fine countenance of a great man already doomed, but who, stoical to the end, worked courageously in the face of death.



...with the Countess Helene ... in the Church of St. Thomas ... On ... and the ... of ... embracing the ... of ... But throughout ... testify to the ... in his work.

How could the artist ... together ... when ... of ... painted in this period, ... the ... of which ...

*Study for the "Garden of Love" in the Prado.*

(BERLIN PRINT ROOM.)

... the ... in the ... with ... the ... years ... to his ... of the ... and ... in the ... to depict ... in ... He is dressed ... in the ... It is the ... of the ... of ... yet the ... and ... has a certain ... the ... on the ... of a ... and seems to ... on the ... This ... to the ... of ...



Printed by Draeger, Paris.



Occasionally, when fatigue or pain became excessive, Rubens felt more imperiously the need of rest, and he sought some relief from his sufferings at Steen, glad to find there the well-known scenery, his animals, his tenants, the peaceful atmosphere, the solitude and quiet charm of which he so much loved. But even then he did not long remain idle. He spent the summer of 1638 there with his family, leaving the care of his Antwerp house and its treasures to his pupil, the sculptor Lucas Faydherbe. This young man had been in his studio for a year, and Rubens thoroughly appreciated the precision and intelligence with which he transposed the designs furnished him by the master into another art. Rubens was, moreover, greatly attached to this new pupil. We quote here the whole of a short letter Rubens sent him from Steen on August 17, 1638, for it furnishes precise information on Rubens's private life, on his tastes, his love of work, and his attention to details.

"MY DEAR AND MUCH LOVED LUCAS,—I hope that this will find you at Antwerp, for I have great need of a panel on which I painted three life-size heads with my own hand; to wit, an angry soldier, wearing a black cap, and two men weeping. You would do me a great favour if you would send me the panel at once, or, if you are intending to come here soon, bring it with you. You had better protect it with one or two spoilt panels, so that no one may see it during the transport. We are surprised to hear nothing of the bottles of Ay wine, for we have already finished what we brought with us. I hope you are well, as well as Catherine and Susanna, and remain most devotedly. . . .

"P.S.—Take care before leaving to fasten up everything securely, and let no originals, little pictures or sketches, remain in the studio. Also remind William, the gardener, to send us in due season the Rosalie pears, the figs, or anything else that is good."

Rubens must then have continued to work at Steen, since he expressed a wish to Faydherbe to consult the sketch that had been put aside in the Antwerp studio. But he had to adapt his tasks to his strength, and only painted works of small dimensions, abandoning

the execution of large canvases, since his health no longer permitted the toil they entailed. The wife and children, who were always at hand, supplied him with charming models. It was doubtless at Steen that he brushed in, one day when he was in the vein, the spirited portrait of Helena and her three children, the delightful panel in the Louvre, "the admirable sketch, the scarcely indicated dream, left unfinished either by chance or on purpose."<sup>1</sup> The young woman, seated on a chair, wears a felt hat with large feathers, and a white dress. On her lap is her youngest child, an infant who plays with a bird tied by a string, and holds its little perch. On the left stands a little girl, who looks at her mother; on the right a younger child—represented fully, no doubt, in the original work, though the arms are now cut by the frame—stretches its hands towards her. The individual expression of the faces is intelligently characterised by a few strokes with extraordinary life and freshness; Helena's head, especially, is softly touched in with a caressing, liquid brush, as is also her breast, which is in a warm, transparent penumbra. The execution, an exquisite mixture of vague forms and firm touches, reveals Rubens's pleasure in painting, and is a sort of reflection of the domestic happiness which he still enjoyed in his rare moments of freedom from pain. The *Holy Family* in the Cologne Museum, formerly, it is believed, in Jabach's collection, is almost of the same dimensions, and was doubtless inspired by this portrait of Helena. The posture is different, but the features of the Virgin and the Infant Jesus are hers and her child's; and the infant plays with the same captive bird. Perhaps we may recognise Helena's parents, or relatives of either Rubens or his wife, in the St. Joseph and St. Elizabeth, who lovingly look on at the naïve scene. Their types, in any case, often occur in other compositions of the same style, a fact that authorises the belief that they were persons closely connected with Rubens.

In his voluntary confinement to the family circle, Rubens delighted in multiplying these religious pictures. He painted at this period the *Riposo* of the Prado, one of his last works; it figures in the

<sup>1</sup> Fromentin. *Les Maîtres d'autrefois*, p. 122.



catalogue of the sale held after his death, and was bought for the King of Spain for 880 florins. The moderate dimensions of the picture (2 ft. 10'25 in. by 4 ft. 5'14 in.), go to prove that it was wholly by the master's hand, and the important place filled in it by the landscape seems to justify the hypothesis that it was painted at Steen. It is one of the most charming of Rubens's works. Several of the figures—the Virgin, who has Helena's features, and the two young women who reverently approach her—are borrowed from the *Garden of Love*. The composition includes a St. George, standing, his foot on the head of the dragon he has slain, two little angels above the Madonna, gambolling in a rosebush in flower, and two others playing with a lamb near a third who signs to them not to disturb the slumbers of the Infant Jesus; a little apart, St. Joseph sleeps, resting against a tree. Jegher engraved the central part with all the breadth characteristic of his talent. Beautiful



STUDY FOR THE ROMAN CHARITY.  
(The Hermitage.)

forms and brilliant colours meet the eye at every turn. The master has scattered charming details throughout, as if he wished to associate the joys of nature with the poetic expression of domestic happiness; springs which break into little cascades, a bullfinch and a goldfinch chirping to each other in the flowering bushes, trees of light and varied foliage; above the horizon, the setting sun tints the sweet and smiling idyll with warm reflections.

But Rubens had not long to enjoy the pure impressions procured him by his residence in the country. When bad weather made it necessary for him to quit Steen in the autumn of 1639, he left it never to return. On his return to Antwerp he was assailed by the cares inseparable from his life there; his important position made escape from them impossible. He was always ready to help others, and interested himself in the work of colleagues, gave them advice, procured them commissions, looked after their families, and, when necessary, their orphan children. Thus on July 22, 1637, he married his ward, Anne Brueghel, to his friend, the youthful David Teniers, a very talented artist, who was beginning to enjoy the King of Spain's favour.

Rubens devoted his brief moments of respite from gout to the pictures, the despatch of which Philip IV. continued to urge; but we learn from the Archduke Ferdinand's letters that these moments become more and more rare. Replying to the king from Brussels on January 10. 1640, he informed him "that a fresh attack of gout prevented Rubens from working, and that a passport had been asked for in France for the largest pictures, which could not be sent by the ordinary methods of transport. Those which were finished and dry should be sent off at the first opportunity." But the master's condition grew worse, and on April 5, following, the Archduke had again to explain the cause of the delay. "A great disaster has occurred regarding the pictures on which your Majesty speaks. Rubens has been crippled in both hands for more than a month, with little hope of being again able to use his brushes. He does all he can to cure himself, and his condition may improve with warmer weather; if not, it will be a great pity that the three large pictures should remain unfinished. I assure your Majesty that I will do all that I can; the ten small ones are almost finished." Ferdinand was evidently less concerned about Rubens's health than about his brother's impatience, and the worst aspect of the case for him, was that possibly the pictures might not be finished. All this time Rubens had to contend with increasing pain, but his courage did not desert him. When work was impossible, he sought to occupy

the long days of cruel suffering as best he could. He was unable to write himself, but he dictated replies to the letters he received. An English amateur named Norgate, passing through Antwerp, noticed in Rubens's studio a view of the Escorial from the mountains, with the ponds, and the road to Madrid disappearing in the distance. He spoke of the landscape to Charles I., believing it to be by Rubens, and the king, desirous of purchasing it, charged Gerbier to conduct the business. Rubens hastened to undeceive the king: "the picture was not by him, but by one of the most ordinary painters of the town, named Verbult,<sup>1</sup> after a drawing of mine made on the spot." But as Charles persisted in his desire to have the landscape, Rubens told Gerbier that he had had it finished by Verbult "according to that artist's capacity, but under his own direction," and that it had been despatched to England. The master "hoped that the extravagance of the subject would afford his Majesty some pleasure," and he took the opportunity of recalling in great detail his excursion to the Escorial with Velazquez.

On another occasion, his memories of Italy were awakened by a gift from the Flemish sculptor, François du Quesnoy, who sent him from Rome several plaster models, and casts of two children's figures he had executed for the tomb of Van Huffel in the Chiesa dell' Anima. Rubens was greatly touched by the *Fiammingo's* delicate attention, and thanked him effusively. He apologised "for not knowing better how to praise the beauty of his sculptures, which seemed to him a work of nature rather than of art, as if life itself had touched the marble. Praises of your statue of St. Andrew, lately unveiled, have reached me, and I rejoice on my own part and on that generally of all our compatriots at the glory it reflects on our country. Were I not prevented by my age and the gout which render me absolutely useless, I should hasten to you to see and admire the perfection of so remarkable a work. I hope at least to see you here among us, and that Flanders, our beloved country, may, one day, be adorned with the glory of your works. I hope, too,

<sup>1</sup> Jan Wildens had been his pupil prior to entering Rubens's studio.

that day may come before my eyes, so desirous of contemplating your marvels, are closed for ever."

On April 5, 1640, the very day on which the archduke conveyed to his brother the alarming accounts he had received of Rubens's health, the artist, always eager to be helpful, gave Lucas Faydherbe a testimonial which he signed with his own hand, dwelling on his merits as a man and an artist. He certified that "as his pupil had lived with him for more than three years, he had been able, under his direction, and by reason of the affinities between painting and sculpture, to make great progress in his art, thanks to his aptitude and diligence; that he had executed for him various works in ivory of finished workmanship, and worthy of praise, as the carvings themselves proved. The most remarkable was a statue of the Virgin destined for the Church of the Béguinage at Mechlin, that he had done alone without any assistance. Its beauty was such, that in the master's opinion, no sculptor in all the land could do better. Therefore Rubens thought it the duty of the nobles and the magistracies of the towns to show him favour, and to encourage him by means of honours, exemptions and privileges, to settle among them permanently, and embellish their dwellings with his works." So flattering a testimonial from such a man could not fail to be useful to Faydherbe in his career. It probably brought about the conclusion of a marriage desired by him, for while the document would help to procure him commissions in the future, it would also reassure the parents of the young girl to whose hand he aspired. In any case, the sculptor married the said Marie Smeyers on May 1, 1640, and Rubens, glad to have contributed to his pupil's happiness, wrote him the following letter, which we quote at length, on May 9:

"SIR,—I have learned with great pleasure that on the first of this month you planted the may in your mistress's garden. I hope it will take root, and in time bring forth fruit. My wife, my two sons, and I cordially wish you and your consort lasting happiness and pleasure in your married life. Do not hurry about that little child in ivory for

me ; you have to occupy yourself with another work of the same kind of the highest importance. We shall, of course, always be delighted to see you. I expect my wife will pass through Mechlin in a few days on her way to Steen, and she will then give you our good wishes verbally. Meanwhile, present my affectionate remembrances to your father and mother-in-law. I hope you will increase their happiness in this alliance by your good conduct. I send the same messages to your father and mother, who must laugh at your abandonment of the journey you had planned to Italy ; instead of losing her son, your mother has gained a daughter, who will soon, with God's help, make her a grandmother. I remain, cordially yours, etc."

From the tone of this letter, with its somewhat broad pleasantries (pleasantries, be it said, that were quite in the taste of the time), its good humour and frank gaiety, we might almost suppose that when Rubens wrote it he was in good health. It would seem that he felt some confidence in resuming his ordinary life, and yet it is the last letter of his that has been preserved. It coincided with a momentary improvement in his condition, of which the Archduke, writing to Philip IV. from Brussels, on May 2, informed his brother: "Rubens hopes to finish the remaining large pictures and the ten small ones about Easter." But the illusion was not of long duration. On May 20, Ferdinand was obliged to admit that the pictures had made no progress. It was no longer about Easter, but about St. John's Day, that he hopes to despatch them, "using all possible speed, but Rubens cannot guarantee it." His sufferings became much more acute, and the great man felt that he had not much longer to live. But he preserved his courage and serenity even in the face of death, and wished, while he retained full possession of his faculties, to settle his affairs definitely. Perhaps it was by his wife's desire that he defined her position, that of the two sons of his first marriage, and that of Helena's children more clearly than in the will of 1631, and the codicil added on September 16, 1639. Toussaint Guyot, the official notary of his Majesty's Privy Council, was sent for, and declared according to the customary formula that "Rubens, knight, and his

lawful wife, Helena Fourment, had appeared before him, both being known to him, and sound of mind, heart, and memory . . . although the aforesaid gentleman was ill in body, and in bed." The deed did not take the form of a testamentary disposition made solely by Rubens, but was a reciprocal will, testifying once again to the spirit of order and justice by which the master was governed even at this supreme moment.<sup>1</sup>

The will cancelled all previous dispositions made by the couple. They chose the Church of St. Jacques for their burial place, leaving the funeral arrangements to the goodwill of the survivor, the executors, and the guardians of their children under age. One hundred florins were bequeathed to the churchwardens of the church, and five hundred to the poor of Antwerp. The testator declared that if a picture like that promised had not been delivered to J. Moermans during his life-time, compensation must be made to Moermans immediately after his death. Albert Rubens, the eldest son of Isabella Brant, and secretary to his Majesty's Privy Council, was to inherit his father's library, and to divide with his brother Nicholas all the agates and medals, except the vases of agate or jasper, or other precious stones, on condition that he would not sell the said agates and medals, except by mutual consent, and that he "would in no way contest the provisions of the will, nor enter into any litigation, under penalty of forfeiting his legacies."

"If the testator died first, he gave and bequeathed a child's share to the testatrix, his lawful wife, of all the property left by him, besides the jewels she became possessed of at her marriage (a list of these jewels is appended), as well as all her garments of wool, silk, gold and silver, and her personal linen, as also half of all the common property and acquisitions accruing to her according to the laws and customs of the town, and according to the marriage contract of December 4, 1630,

<sup>1</sup> A complete copy of this interesting document was recently found among the papers of the Château of Gaebeck, the property of the Marchesa Arconati-Visconti. It was communicated to the public by M. J. Camphout; the chief articles were then translated by M. Ed. Bonaffé (*Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1891, Vol. II. p. 205), and the will was at length published in its entirety by M. P. Genard in the *Bulletin Rubens*, 1895, p. 125.



XL

*The Virgin and Saints.*

(CHURCH OF ST. JACQUES, ANTWERP.)





Painting by Giovanni Stanetti, 17th century



and the provisions concerning the furniture, which reverts to the lawful wife according to the laws and customs of the town. Giving and bequeathing the rest to Albert and Nicholas Rubens, his sons by his first wife, and to the children born, or to be born<sup>1</sup> of his present marriage, to be equally divided between them and his lawful wife, after a proper inventory had been made, and allowing no one child to have any sort of advantage over the others. . . . Except that the children of the first marriage should receive and keep half of the House and Manor of Steen, with the lands, woods and meadows belonging to it . . . the common heirs to be indemnified for this with 50,000 florins paid once for all. . . . The testatrix to have sole possession of the other half."

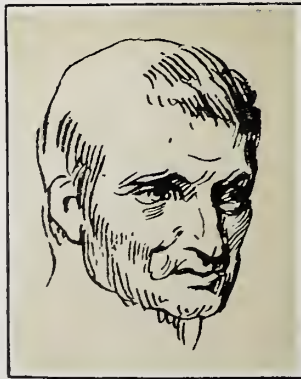
The jewels of gold or silver, the diamonds and other precious stones, forming part of the inheritance, were to be valued by competent persons, and divided into as many portions as there were heirs, and to be then drawn for by lot. . . .

"Concerning the pictures, statues, and other works of art, they are to be sold publicly, or by private contract, at a favourable time and place, in the most advantageous manner, and by the advice of the painters Frans Snyders, Jan Wildens, and the above-named Jacques Moermans, except the portraits of the testator's two lawful wives, and those of himself corresponding, which he desired to descend to their respective children, and the picture called the *Pelisse*, which he bequeathed to his present wife, its value not to be included in the assets of the inheritance. He also excepted all the drawings that he had collected or made himself, which were to be kept for the advantage of any one of his sons who might devote himself to the art of painting, or, failing this, for any one of his daughters who may marry an artist of repute, and this to remain in abeyance till his youngest child should have attained the age of eighteen. Should neither of these hypotheses be realised, the drawings to be sold, and the profits divided like the other property."

The articles that follow refer to the possibility of Helena's pre-

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the fact that Helena was then *enceinte*.

decease. This lengthy document provided for everything with the most minute care, in order to leave no possible excuse for litigation. Only the heroic energy of Rubens, exhausted as he was, could have borne the fatigue of such a formality. On this date, May 27, the artist had only three days to live. Probably in the final crisis one of his legs was opened, for in the accounts rendered by Helena, as trustee, on November 7, 1645, fees paid to the doctors, Lazarus and Spinola, and to Messrs. Henri and Daepe, barbers, "for their attention to the defunct's feet," are noted. Rumours of the gravity of Rubens's illness spread to Brussels, and on May 31 Gerbier, who happened to be there just then, informed a Mr. Murray in London that his life was despaired of, and that the most celebrated physicians had been sent from Brussels, perhaps by the Archduke, to try to relieve him. But all their skill was vain; and when Gerbier wrote this letter, Rubens was no more. He died at noon on May 30, aged sixty-four years all but a month. According to the custom of the time, his body was carried on the evening of the same day to the church of St. Jacques, to be placed provisionally in the vault of the Fourment family.



PEN DRAWING OF A HEAD.

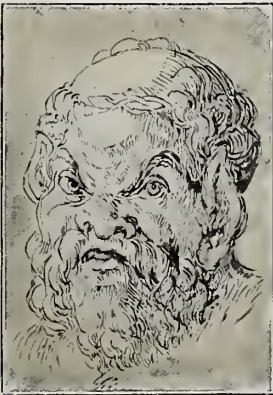
(Facsimile of a drawing in the Louvre.)



THE RAPE OF PROSERPINE (FRAGMENT).  
(The Prado.)

## CHAPTER XI

RUBENS'S FUNERAL—DIVISION OF HIS PROPERTY—SALE OF HIS PICTURES AND COLLECTIONS—THE RUBENS CHAPEL IN THE CHURCH OF ST. JACQUES—THE "VIRGIN SURROUNDED BY SAINTS"—THE ARTIST, THE MAN, AND HIS WORK.



HEAD OF A FAUN.  
(The Louvre.)

IN Rubens the town of Antwerp lost the most illustrious of her children. He was mourned no doubt by the whole population, but no document records the effect produced by the demise of the great artist whose works and fame filled so important a place in the history of Flanders at that time. Contemporary poets and authors, usually so eager to scatter broadcast hyperbolic eulogies of men who are now entirely forgotten, preserved an absolute silence concerning a death that would have furnished ample material for the bombastic panegyrics in which they delighted. As M. Max Rooses<sup>1</sup> remarks, the only thing of the kind to be noted is the line devoted

<sup>1</sup> *Malerschule Antwerpens*, p. 252.

to Rubens in Alexander van Fornenbergh's *Proteus of Antwerp*, in which he declared his inability to sing his praises. "As well try," he says, "to equal the golden rays of the sun with black charcoal." But while public testimony is wanting, the trustee's accounts rendered by Helena Fourment in 1645, supply curious details touching Rubens's funeral, details characteristic of the epoch, some of them prescribed by the master himself. The pomp and magnificence of the funeral ceremony, which took place three days after his death, on June 2, 1640, proved that his family spared nothing to render the solemnity worthy of him. The coffin was of inlaid wood; the wax tapers and candles were decorated with satin crosses; the church was hung with draperies ornamented with the armorial bearings of the deceased, and six mourning rapiers, made by the armourer Hendrick Rys; the servants and many of the guests were supplied with fans, gloves, hoods, cloaks, and complete suits; a solemn service of the first class was held with full peal of bells. The *Miserere* and the *Dies Iræ* were chanted by the choir of the Cathedral; all the municipal bodies of Antwerp, members of the clergy, and representatives of the different religious orders: Preachers, Augustines, Minims, Capuchins, bare-footed Carmelites, Fathers of Notre-Dame, Minorites, etc., were present. Thus, nothing was wanting to the brilliance of the proceedings.<sup>1</sup> After the ceremony, according to Rubens's own orders, four funeral banquets were held: one, at his own house, for the relatives and friends; another at the town-hall for the members of the magistracy, the municipal treasurer and a few specially invited guests; a third at the *Golden Marigold* tavern, for the society of the *Romanists*, of which Rubens had been one of the most zealous officers; and lastly, a fourth, at the *Stag* tavern, for the members of the Guild of St. Luke, and the Society of the *Wallflower*, making a total of thirty-four guests. The host of the *Arms of France* received twenty-six florins for providing the Ay wine, of which Rubens had been so fond. In addition, meals

<sup>1</sup> We borrow the greater part of these details, and of those concerning the division of the property, from M. Génard's valuable work, *Anteekeningen over den grooten Meester Antwerp*, 1877. 4to.

were provided for the reverend fathers, the Capuchins and the Carmelites, and a collation with *white bread* for the St. Clare sisters. The sum spent on the occasion by the family amounted to 1,000 florins. The poor were not forgotten: 100 florins were bequeathed to the churchwardens of St. Jacques, and 500 to the almoners of the town for distribution among the poor. Eight hundred funeral masses were celebrated in specified churches at Antwerp, Mechlin, and Ellewyt, the parish of Steen. For six consecutive weeks a mass was said daily in the Church of St. Jacques, by the Chaplain, Willem van Meldert, and the mourning draperies were kept up during the whole of this time.

According to the custom of the age, the will was read on the day of the funeral, and on June 8 and the days following, the inventory of the pictures, furniture, works of art, letters, and title-deeds, was proceeded with, that the division of the property among the heirs might be speedily accomplished, according to the testator's wishes. It was a long and complicated operation, entailing a number of formalities, for a large fortune, of which the total, after all expenses had been deducted, was equal to about £60,000, had to be dealt with. We learn from M. Génard's careful researches how the greater part of this fortune, acquired by hard work, and increased by the great artist's intelligence, and his spirit of order, was invested. The prudence and variety of these investments testify to the practical good sense which was one of the striking features of Rubens's character and genius. A notable portion was invested in municipal or national loans; a part was lent on simple promissory notes or mortgages of private persons. But a still more important part consisted of landed property, situated mostly in the neighbourhood of Antwerp. The most considerable items of this real estate were the house on the Wapper, and the Manor of Steen, to which Rubens continued to add until his death, for, a few days before, on May 8, 1640, he bought a piece of land adjoining the demesne. The Antwerp house was put up for sale, but did not find a purchaser: it was therefore occupied by Helena, at an annual rent of four hundred

florins, until 1600, when a merchant named J. Van Eyck, alderman of the town, became its possessor.<sup>1</sup> Steen was not sold until 1682. The furniture of the two dwellings was inventoried and valued at the same time as the pictures, works of art and plate, which, after the birth of Constantina Albertina (September 2, 1640), Rubens's posthumous daughter, were divided by lot among the heirs according to the provisions of the will. The plate and jewels were valued at 16,674 florins by two jewellers. The most valuable of the jewels, a large diamond ring valued at 6,900 florins, was kept by Helena, who had a right to half of the whole plus a child's share. Albert, the eldest son, paid a balance of about 1,500 florins to preserve, in memory of his father, a diamond necklace with *Croix à la Mode*, and a cross of small rose diamonds, the whole valued at 2,640 florins; Nicholas had the diamond hat-band, the gift of the King of England. The handsome gold chain, also a gift of Charles I., was included in Helena's lot; by her desire, and with the consent of her children's guardians, it was melted down, and brought in a net sum of 3,122 florins, the medallion alone which was attached to it being preserved by the family. Another alienation which, if not necessitated by the legal provisions, would seem even more strange, was that of the clothes forming Rubens's wardrobe; they were bought immediately after his death by Lindemans, an old clothes-dealer, for 1,093 florins. Whatever were the legal provisions, it would probably have been easy to elude them, and we should prefer to ignore certain proceedings that were scarcely in keeping with the position and fortune of the family. In conclusion, we may state that several other valuables that had belonged to Rubens are still in the possession of his descendants, notably the silver ewer and salver, which are in Baron C. de Borrekens's collection at Antwerp, and the central diamond of the hat-band, given him by Charles I., now in the possession of M. J. Van Havre. The sword with which Rubens was knighted in England, and the diploma of knighthood, which figured in the Fine Art

<sup>1</sup> It had become the property of one of his relatives, the Canon Hilwerve, when Harrewyn engraved the two plates reproduced above in 1684 and 1692.





*Landscape.*

(Pen and Ink Drawing touched with Bistre and Colours.)

(THE LOUVRE.)

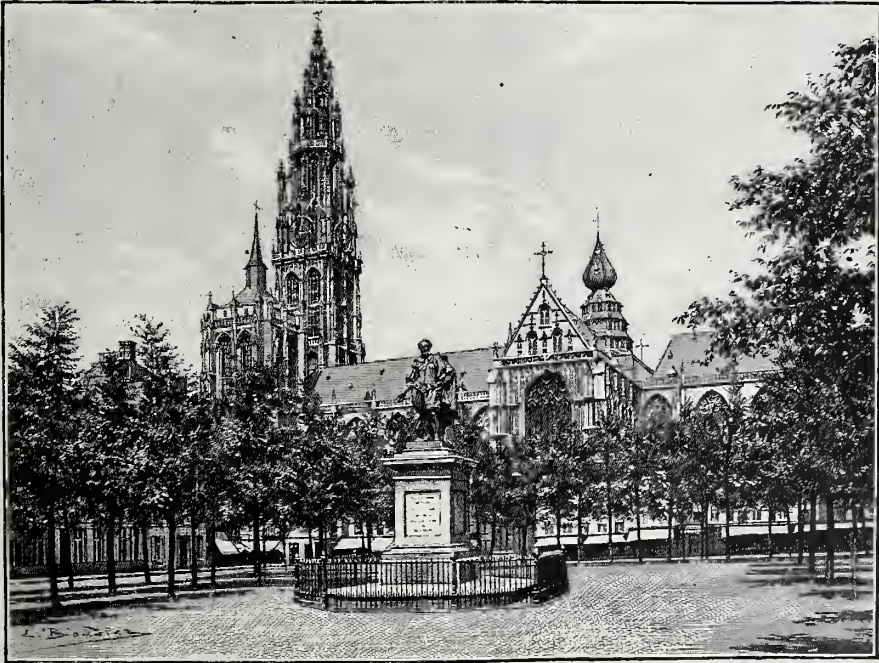


Printed by Deeger, Paris.



Exhibition at Antwerp in 1854, were lent by Count A. Van der Stegen of Louvain.

The medals, bas-reliefs, and other antiquities which formed so large a portion of Rubens's collections, were placed, so the inventory drawn up after his death informs us, "in the *Tower* of the deceased man's house," that is, in the *Rotunda*, which we see in Harrewyn's engraving. These antiquities, as we have seen, were left in equal



ANTWERP CATHEDRAL AND THE RUBENS STATUE.

(Drawing by Boudier. From a photograph.)

shares to Albert and Nicholas, and the fine library was made the subject of a special bequest to Albert.

It is probable that Rubens's papers, and his extensive correspondence with the most celebrated artists, scholars, and statesmen of his time, remained in the possession of Helena, and of Albert, who, succeeding his father in the office of secretary to the Privy Council, had a special interest in preserving them. Several collections of Rubens's letters have been published, but they probably include but

a very small part of those he wrote. We do not know what has become of the rest, but their loss is greatly to be regretted, for in spite of the abundant information available about the great artist, they would probably throw fresh light on his life. We agree with M. P. Génard in refusing to believe that his heirs destroyed the papers, and we hope that they may some day be found. This hope has been partly realised in recent years by the publication of documents in the archives of the Château of Gaesbeck, generously permitted by the Marchesa Arconati-Visconti, a connection of the family of Albert Rubens.

We saw in Rubens's will that the drawings by other masters in his collection, as well as those by himself, were not to be sold until the youngest of his children had reached the age of eighteen, and then only if none of his children, and none of his daughters' husbands, showed any serious vocation for painting. This proved to be the case. At the time fixed, that is, in 1659, the drawings were sold, and dispersed throughout the principal galleries of Europe. The famous amateur, Jabach, bought a great many, and the most notable examples in the Louvre were sold to Lewis XIV. by him in 1671 and 1676, or came from the Crozat Collection, for which they were acquired from Jabach.

The pictures possessed by Rubens are to us the most interesting part of his collections. Besides family portraits which, according to Rubens's wishes, fell to their rightful owners, the heirs bought in several of the pictures at the valuations made by F. Snyders, J. Wildens, and Moermans. Helena, to whom the *Pelisse* was bequeathed, further chose the *Conversation à la mode* (one of the versions of the *Garden of Love*), the *Dance of Italian Peasants* (the *Ronda* of the Prado), a *Christmas Eve*, the portrait of John Rubens, her husband's father, that of her sister Susanna (the famous *Chapeau de Poil* of the National Gallery), who married, as her second husband, Arnold Lunden, for which she paid a lump sum of 300 florins, and which was sold in 1822 for over £2,880, three studies of heads of Capuchins, and probably all the pictures at Steen, which had been valued at 321 florins. Albert

Rubens, besides the fine portrait of his father with Isabella Brant (Munich Gallery), chose several other family portraits, notably those of his grandparents, John Rubens and Maria Pypelincx, four portraits or studies of Susanna Lunden, a large landscape with a view of Steen, valued at 1,250 florins, and other less important pictures; Nicholas only took copies, unfinished works, or those of little value. Other pictures and copies were given as souvenirs to friends and persons who had done services to Rubens or his family, especially to the two Mechlin physicians who were called in to a consultation at Steen. Other pictures were sold privately for the prices at which they were valued.

There were in addition a certain number of pictures commissioned by the King of Spain, which, as we know, had not been finished owing to Rubens's illness. The Archduke Ferdinand, continuing the correspondence he had so actively carried on with his brother on the subject, wrote from Ghent on June 10, 1640: "Rubens died ten days ago, and I can assure your Majesty that I was greatly grieved at it, owing to the condition of the pictures. One of the two large ones is almost finished, the other sketched in, and the two small ones well advanced. I beg your Majesty to tell me what you wish me to do: if I shall send them as they are, or if I shall have them finished by another artist. There are only two here to whom the work could be entrusted, and they are greatly inferior to Rubens. One of them is his chief collaborator, who worked on a large number of his master's pictures; but as Rubens was always by him, he constantly directed him, and we cannot tell what he would do if left to himself, for, in truth, he has never been anything but a collaborator. The other is Cray (G. de Crayer), a very famous master, particularly for figures of large size; he painted the portrait of me I sent your Majesty last year. He was not very friendly with Rubens, who did not employ him on the Torre de la Parada pictures, and I do not know if there is any work of his in Spain." We note the laconic tone of the letter in announcing Rubens's death. Ferdinand mentions it in passing, without a word of regret for the loss of the great artist, who had shown

such entire devotion to the reigning family, and who, a prey to cruel sufferings, had struggled to the end with pain and weariness in order to satisfy the Spanish King. The Archduke is mainly concerned about the unfinished pictures. He repeatedly refers to them in his correspondence, particularly in the following letter dated from the Camp of Reveretz, September 23, 1640. "Since I wrote to your Majesty about Rubens's pictures, I hear that Van Dyck is expected at Antwerp about St. Luke's day, and as he is both a great painter and a pupil of Rubens, I thought it best to delay giving the work to another until I had spoken to Van Dyck, and discovered if he would finish them, which would be doubtless the best solution of the difficulty. But he has his moods and I can assure your Majesty of nothing. The finished paintings shall be forwarded by the couriers, although some of them are too large for them to carry. Those shall be sent with the others and the passport. There are many excellent paintings in Rubens's studio, and to avoid error and to conform more surely to your Majesty's taste, I send the catalogue of all as you desired. Your answer will certainly reach me in time, since the catalogue is to be printed and distributed throughout Europe." In the letters that followed, Ferdinand continued to send his brother information of the progress of the pictures. On November 10, 1640, he wrote from Brussels "that the work was being hurried on. I hope," he said, "that three will soon be finished. Rubens had only sketched in the fourth, and I did not ask Van Dyck to finish that or the others, on account of the haste we are in." Van Dyck, besides, as was expected, would not consent to finish a work begun by another. At the zenith of his fame, in the full enjoyment of Charles I.'s favour, he was little disposed to give up his time, for which the great English nobles eager to have his works were contending, to such tasks. Ferdinand, however, had been wise enough "to give him a commission for the same subject of like dimensions, to be executed at his pleasure, and he returned to England, delighted with the work." A few days later, February 2, 1641, the Archduke informed Philip IV. that all the pictures were now at Brussels, that they were very fine, and as he hoped, to his



Majesty's taste. Only one of the large ones was wanting, and the painter promised to finish it in a month. "On March 9, the pictures were despatched, and in the last letter that refers to them<sup>1</sup> the Archduke informed the King of Spain that "the picture was well advanced, but would not be finished before the end of August; he hoped that it would be a success, for the painter had done his best, and as he was beginning to gain some reputation, he tried to succeed to that of Rubens." (July 20, from the Camp of Morbeq). The reference is to Jordaens, and the *Andromeda* of the Prado; the accounts of the estate mention a sum of 240 florins paid to the artist by the family for finishing the *Andromeda*, as well as a *Hercules*, also intended for Philip IV. Philippe le Roy paid Rubens's heirs on June 24, 1641, 4,200 florins for these two pictures, a *Rape of the Sabines*, and another painting, all for the King of Spain.



THE MARTYRDOM OF TWO SAINTS.  
(Boymans Museum.)

He was anxious to have as many of Rubens's works in his collections as possible, and did not lose the opportunity pointed out to him by the Archduke, of purchasing some of the best pictures left in the master's studio. Don Francesco de Roxas was ordered to buy thirty-two pictures for the King, among them being several copies from Titian: the *Saviour holding a Globe in His Hand*, the *Martyrdom*

<sup>1</sup> All the correspondence between Ferdinand and Philip IV. relating to the commissions given by the king to Rubens has been published by Herr Justi in the appendix to his admirable work on *Diego Velasquez*, Vol. II. pp. 401—411.

of *St. Peter*, *Calisto*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Venus and Cupid*, the *Rape of Europa*, as well as originals by Titian, Tintoretto, and Paolo Veronese, notably a *Lady with a Dog*, a *Venetian Bride*, and a *grisaille* by Veronese ; a landscape by Paul Bril and four by Elsheimer. By Rubens himself: a *Carnival*, *Nymphs*, *Swiss Guards*, the *Ronda*, a *Stag-Hunt*, the *Pilgrims of Emmäus*, *St. George*, *Three Nymphs bearing a Cornucopia*, and the *Virgin with St. George*, all for 27,100 florins, for which the treasurer-general of the district—J. van Ophem—gave security. Gaspar de Crayer, Salomon de Nobeliers, and de Roxas, who had conducted the business, received a picture each for their trouble. The rest of the pictures were sold by auction by the advice of the three artists appointed by Rubens as consultants. A certain Fr. Hercke was ordered to make a catalogue of the pictures and to translate it into French. This catalogue, printed by J. van Meurs, included 314 pictures, and at the end, without a number, “three canvases pasted upon board, being the *Triumphs of Julius Cæsar* after A. Mantegna, unfinished ; six large canvases, unfinished, containing *Sieges of Towns, Battles and Triumphs of Henry IV.*, which were begun some years ago for the Luxembourg Palace ; a number of faces from life on panel and canvas, some by Rubens, others by Van Dyck . . . . a number of copies . . . . some fine antique marble heads ; a number of modern figures, &c.” Then follows a list of a number of carvings in ivory “of Rubens’s invention,” executed probably by L. Faydherbe.

Specially appointed agents represented the King of Spain, the Emperor of Germany, the Elector of Bavaria, and the King of Poland at the sale which took place on March 17, 1642, and the following days, and was continued throughout April, May, and June. The sale realised a sum of 52,804 florins, and another set of pictures, the property of the deceased and his two sons by his first marriage, was also sold for 16,649 florins. The family gave a gratuity of 300 florins to the painter, Nicholas de la Morlette, who had prepared the pictures for the sale, and the widow, H. Snyers, who kept the *Golden Marigold* tavern where the sales were held, was paid in two instalments, 168 and 306

florins, for the various expenses, and the refreshments supplied to the amateurs who attended them.

The division of the property was completed without serious difficulties. On January 13, 1643, Albert and Nicholas Rubens laid before the Council of Brabant certain objections regarding the general estate, but the difference was amicably settled; as a proof of this, it may be mentioned that on May 29 following, Nicholas, being in want of money, Helena consented to re-purchase from him for 17,500 florins, a certain number of mortgages and pieces of land included in his share. The marriage of Rubens's widow with J. B. van Broekhoven, Lord of Bergheyke, Alderman of Antwerp, and Councillor of the High Court of Brussels, which took place between July 11 and August 28, 1645,<sup>1</sup> hurried on the liquidation of the inheritance. Some of Rubens's biographers express surprise that the young widow should have consented to change the illustrious name she bore. If Rubens's ever-increasing fame makes such a marriage offensive to them, it is only fair to remember that when Helena married the great artist, she was a girl of sixteen, and that she was barely twenty-six when he died; left alone without experience to bring up her children and administer a large fortune, it was quite excusable, that, after five years of widowhood, she should seek support and counsel in a second marriage. Let us add in Bergheyke's favour that he conducted himself admirably towards Rubens's family, both as regards the definitive settlement of the pending succession, which was signed on April 9, 1646, and in the final arrangements to be made for the master's tomb.

Rubens, although he expressed a desire to be buried in the Church of St. Jacques, made no formal provision for his sepulchre in his will. But, as his heirs stated, in the request made to the magistracy of Antwerp, the great artist, when consulted by his family a few days before his death, said, with his habitual modesty, "That if his family considered him worthy of the memorial, they might build a chapel

<sup>1</sup> Up to July 11 Helena figures in official documents as the widow of Rubens, but from August 28 onwards her husband intervenes.

in the Church to receive his remains, and, in that case, might place there his picture, the *Virgin and Saints*, and the marble statue of *Our Lady of Sorrows*, by Faydherbe." After Rubens's death, his heirs carried out his wishes; they made a contract with the churchwardens of St. Jacques, on November 21, 1641, which was approved by the magistracy and the Bishop of Antwerp respectively. A deed of March 14, 1642, provided that the churchwardens should erect a chapel for 5,000 florins, the decoration of which was to be completed by the family at their expense, and according to their taste. The work was finished in November, 1643, and Rubens's remains were laid in the vault of the chapel, where an annual service, for which the family made a perpetual endowment, was to be held henceforth in his honour.

Rubens's admirers who visit Antwerp should not fail to make a pilgrimage to the Church of St. Jacques, for it contains, besides the artist's tomb, one of his latest and best works. In spite of the mutilations it has undergone, the church, with its lofty, well-lighted nave, and its pulpit carved by Louis Willemsens in 1675, is one of the most interesting buildings in the town. It contains a number of fine examples of Flemish painting and sculpture, sufficiently recommended by the names of Van Orley, Ambrosius Franken, Frans Floris, W. Coebergher, Diepenbeck, C. Schut, and Van Dyck, as well as those of the brothers Jan and Robert Collyns de Nole. Over the tomb of Hendrick van Balen, who died in 1632, we see the portrait of Rubens's former comrade in Van Noort's studio, and that of his wife, painted by himself. Close by in the chapel of the Holy Trinity, the enigmatic picture of *St. Peter and the Tribute Money*, presented to the church by a parishioner in 1844, deserves attention on account of the controversies that it has aroused;<sup>1</sup> farther off is the Chapel of St. Peter and St. Paul, the burial place of the Rockox family from 1515 onwards; the fine triptych of the *Last Judgment*, by Bernard van Orley, which adorns it, contains portraits of the ancestors of the burgomaster, Nicholas Rockox, Rubens's friend;

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. I., p. 34.



*Rubens in Old Age.*

(THE LOUVRE.)

(From a photograph by Braun, Clément et Cie.)



Printed by Draeger, Paris.





another tomb, in the ambulatory, is that of N. Picquery, the Antwerp merchant who lived for some time at Marseilles, and who became Rubens's brother-in-law by his marriage with Elisabeth Fourment, Helena's sister.

Our minds steeped in the memories evoked by these names, we enter the chapel at the end of the choir in the axis of the nave, sacred to Rubens and his family. An inscription engraved on a white marble tablet placed above the altar proclaims its purpose. According to the master's desire, the picture of the *Virgin and Saints*, painted by him, hangs over the altar, and Faydherbe's statue of *Our Lady of Sorrows* occupies a niche above. We should prefer to find in the sanctuary sacred to the name of Rubens nothing but his tomb, but on either side are two other funeral tablets adorned, like his, with armorial bearings and laudatory inscriptions. On the left, that of Frans Rubens, Helena Fourment's second son, and father of the last descendant of Rubens who bore his name—Alexander Joseph Rubens, who died in 1752; on the right, that of the family of Van Parys, also connected with that of the master. At the southern end of the chapel, between the windows, an epitaph is let in, composed by Gevaert in memory of Albert, the artist's eldest son, who died on October 1, 1657, aged 43, and of his wife Clara del Monte, who died a month later from grief at his loss. Rubens's tombstone with his coat of arms, bears the following epitaph, also written by Gevaert in his honour:

D. O. M.  
 PETRUS PAULUS RUBENIUS EQUES,  
 JOANNIS, HUIUS URBIS SENATORIS,  
 FILIUS, STEINI TOPARCHA,  
 QUI INTER CÆTERAS QUIBUS AD MIRACULUM  
 EXCELLUIT, DOCTRINÆ HISTORIÆ PRISCÆ,  
 OMNIUMQ. BONARUM ARTIUM ET ELEGANTIARUM DOTES  
 NON SUI TANTUM SÆCULI  
 SED ET OMNIS ÆVI  
 APELLES DICI MERUIT.

ATQUE AD REGUM PRINCIPUMQ. VIRORUM AMICITIAS  
 GRADUM SIBI FECIT:  
 A PHILIPPO IV HISPANIARUM INDIARUMQ. REGE  
 INTER SANCTIORIS CONCILII SCRIBAS ADSCITUS,  
 ET AD CAROLUM MAGNÆ BRITANNIÆ REGEM  
 ANNO M. D. C. XXIX DELEGATUS,  
 PACIS INTER EOSDEM PRINCIPES MOX INITÆ  
 FUNDAMENTA FELICITER POSUIT.  
 OBIIT ANNO SAL'. M. D. C. XL. XXX MAY. AETATIS LXIV.

But this is not the tablet originally placed by the painter's family over his tomb. Under the epitaph is the following inscription:—

HOC MONUMENTUM A CLARISSIMO GEVARTIO  
 OLIM PETRO PAULO RUBENIO CONSECRATUM  
 A POSTERIS USQUE NEGLECTUM  
 RUBENIANA STIRPE MASCULINA JAM INDE EXTINGTA  
 HOC ANNO MDCC. LV. POSUI CURAVIT.  
 R. D. JOANNES BAPT<sup>s</sup>. JACOBUS DE PARYS  
 HUIUS INSIGNIS ECCLESIAE CANONICUS  
 EX MATRE ET AVIA RUBENIA NEPOS.  
 R. I. P.

The accusation of negligence against Rubens's descendants, *a posteris usque neglectum*, inscribed by the Canon Van Parys on his tomb, was scarcely seemly, even if justifiable. In his essay on *Rubens's Tomb*, Hermann Riegel<sup>1</sup> tries to show the improbability of such neglect. The recent discovery of an unpublished eighteenth century drawing, inserted in a copy of the *Théâtre Sacré de Brabant*, published in 1729—1734, by Baron Le Roy, a copy bought in 1892 for the communal records of Antwerp, irrefutably confirms Riegel's conclusions. The drawing, reproduced here, represents the original monument erected by the family, with the companion epitaph to that of Albert Rubens and his wife, which as we have seen, still exists; the two monuments, as the accounts concerning the estates of

<sup>1</sup> *Beiträge zur niederländischen Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin. 1882. Vol. I. pp. 213—234.

Rubens and of his son Albert testify, were executed by Cornelius van Mindert. It will be noticed that above the monument is an oval portrait of Rubens like those at Windsor, Aix, and Florence. The portrait has disappeared, and M. P. Génard rightly deploras the loss to Antwerp, which "possesses no authentic presentment of the famous head of its school of painting."<sup>1</sup>

The mere name, Rubens, marks the place in which his mortal remains rest far better than Gevaert's hyperbolic Latin, and the picture of the *Virgin and Saints*, destined by himself for his sepulchral chapel, is more eloquent of his genius than the eulogistic formulas lavished on his descendants as abundantly as on himself. It is not, however, necessary to recognise in it—as is too often insisted, in the belief of adding to the interest of the work—his two wives, his daughter, his father, or even himself in the St. George, who has neither his features nor the shape of his face. Without this tradition, which must be relegated to the sentimental legends so frequently to be met in the history of art, the work is sufficient in itself. Leaving aside the touching commentaries that have been grafted on it, the picture's highest praise is that Rubens himself designated it as one most characteristic of his talent. It answers to our expectations, and in such a place that is enough. We ought perhaps to ask if we see it now in its original condition, and as the master painted it. The composition—why not acknowledge it?—seems to us contracted out of all proportion. On the left, one of St. George's arms and one of his feet are cut by the frame; in the upper part, the top of the banner, the head of one of the cherubs, and the palm-branch he holds in his hand, have disappeared, and at the bottom of the panel, the narrow band occupied by the ground ill supports the weight of the figures crowded one against the other. Rubens generally gives them a surer footing, and more air and space. He would not have failed to place above them a large portion of that bluish grey sky he affected, so delicate and perfect a means of

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin Rubens. La Première Épitaphe de Rubens*, by P. Génard. 1895, pp. 260—270.

giving value to soft or brilliant carnations. If the master's habits of composition contradict this lack of balance in the construction of the actual picture, Pontius's engraving, which shows it in its original dimensions, proves that its defects must not be imputed to Rubens, and that his work, pitilessly mutilated, clipped on every side, and especially at the top, was originally more spacious, that it had more atmosphere, and was enframed by neutral tones that enhanced the sheeny colours of the centre. We do not know when the mutilation was accomplished, or whether it was necessitated by the shape and dimensions of the altar. But even as it is, the work testifies to the artist's bold originality, and to the persistence of his memories of Italian art, which at this period of his life, as we saw in his letter to Du Quesnoy, he loved to recall. The general arrangement reminds us of that of Titian's large decorative canvases; the Virgin who holds the Infant Jesus in her arms seems inspired by Paolo Veronese, and the St. George is a reminiscence of that saint in Correggio's *Adoration of the Virgin*, of which Rubens had made a drawing which is now in the Albertina Collection. But the vivacity, ease, and suppleness of the execution, the charming figures of the three Saints, the pleasing flight of the little angels who crowd round the Divine Child, the brilliance and exquisite harmony of the flesh colours, the transparent lightness of the shadows, the delicious mixture of perfect knowledge and of careless ease—all this is Rubens at his best; we are subjugated, moved by the invincible youth of the great painter, who in old age, and on the eve of death, could give this fine picture the supreme seductions of mingled strength and charm, his most spirited touch and his tenderest harmonies.

“The history of this exemplary life ought, if possible,” said Fromentin, “to be written standing on this tomb, and in front of this *St. George*. . . . Having thus before our eyes that which passes away, and that which endures, that which ends and that which remains, we should weigh with more certainty and reverence the ephemeral, the perishable, and the truly immortal in the life of a great man.” But even beside the tomb, and in front of the picture, admirable as it is, it

would be unjust towards Rubens to reply to Fromentin's questions as he himself has done: "Has Rubens ever shown greater perfection? I do not think so. Has he ever shown equal perfection? Not to my knowledge."

The praise couched in these terms is excessive. The *St. George* only shows us one of the sides of the master's talent, and we should hesitate to affirm that it is the most individual, or the best. But can we point to any one painting which, by itself, sums up his genius? It would in any case be easier to mention ten than one. If there are artists who put the whole of themselves into some chosen work which dominates all the others, and who are, as it were, incarnated in it, Rubens was not of them, for his marvellous variety is one of his distinctive qualities. His work is a whole world, and he has touched every style. He only found rest in change of work; he practised all styles in turn, or simultaneously. His fertility was the result of his intelligence and education, and although we recognise exceptional gifts in him, it is possible, up to a certain point, to distinguish the influences that acted on his development, and to discover by the side of his native qualities what was due to personal effort, and the constant exercise of the will.

Few men, it is true, were as well endowed as he was by nature.



INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH OF ST. JACQUES.

(Drawing by Boudier. From a photograph.)

His luminous intelligence, his strong good sense, his extraordinary imagination and memory, his vocation itself, were inborn. The varied circumstances of his life favoured his destiny. The son of an heroic mother, brought up in exile in the hard school of poverty, he early became conscious of his responsibility, and while still young, had to depend on himself. He met the sacrifices made for him by his mother with affection, love of work, and a desire for knowledge that he preserved to the end. Thanks to these habits of application, he was always adding to his knowledge, and yet was never able to satisfy his eager desire for every kind of information. He was born at a period when art was exhausted; amidst the upheavals of a country torn by a fierce internecine struggle between races and creeds, it wavered between an affected imitation of Italy, and the vulgarity of an extravagant realism. But his vigorous faculty of assimilation enabled him to turn the lessons he received in Flanders to account, and they were very diverse. He found what Flemish art had retained of its old vigour in Van Noort's studio, and in Van Veen's, all that Italy had to teach him, even through the weaknesses and insipidities of the painter's eclecticism. Although he had already acquired an admirable knowledge of his art, he determined to continue his apprenticeship beyond the Alps, like so many of his compatriots who lost their individuality there. Chance, that second providence, the calls of which he always docilely obeyed, led him to Venice, where Vincenzo Gonzaga, in quest of a painter, took him into his service. He was but an indifferent patron, but Rubens found all the resources of refined culture, with the works of art collected by Vincenzo's ancestors, at the little Court of Mantua. Indeed, Rubens's surroundings were advantageous; he occupied a position neither too prominent nor too obscure, and the Prince's indifference during the intervals of his passing caprices procured him a certain amount of leisure, when he could take advantage of the quiet and enjoy the antique statues in the ducal palace, the works of Mantegna which adorned the Old Palace, and the frescoes of Giulio Romano in the Palazzo del Té. It was not far from Parma, to which he was attracted

by Correggio, nor from Venice, where he became acquainted with the great colourists whom he soon came to know intimately, Tintoretto, Paolo Veronese, and above all, Titian, by whose vigorous genius he was completely subjugated, and for whom he professed an ever-growing admiration until his death. But his great passion was Rome. There he met his brother, and together they applied themselves to the study of the antique. He made drawings of the scattered ruins of the buildings of the Eternal City, the bas-reliefs, the busts exhumed before his eyes, the noble figures of the Sixtine, the cartoons of Raphael, all the marvels, the praises of which he had heard, and the greatness of which he was well fitted to appreciate. While studying the works of his predecessors, he did not neglect those of his contemporaries. He enquired into all new methods that attracted him; he gave special attention to the chiaroscuro that Caravaggio and the German, Elsheimer, had brought into fashion. He not only sought the society of artists, but also that of scholars, amateurs, prelates and nobles. He was interested in everything; he turned everything to account for the purposes of his art. Although he sometimes worked from the living model, it was at that period, perhaps, that he paid least attention to nature. By Vincenzo Gonzaga's orders, he visited Spain, and although he held a subaltern position, he was well placed for seeing the court, and associating with the great. Intercourse with such varied society aided in the development of the *savoir faire* that was natural to him, and amid the intrigues of courts, his easy manners and perfect tact enabled him to hold his own. His good temper and personal attractions masked extraordinary energy and an indomitable will.

This exile beyond the Alps, and prolonged apprenticeship, delayed the production of original works. He saw much, thought much, and gathered much knowledge, but he only produced a few religious pictures, and a few portraits, the prices of which supplemented his insignificant income, and enabled him to purchase works of art, medallions, antique busts and pictures, which formed the first nucleus of his collections. When he returned to Antwerp after this slow but admirable preparation, his mind, his ideas, his

sense of life were enlarged, his talent was formed; he was a man of distinction, accustomed to the usages of good society. As a painter he was prepared for the great works that were entrusted to him, and was eager to begin them. But although Italy had taught him much, it had not changed his technique. It was fully formed when he left Flanders, and he retained it all his life. He recognised its excellence, and continued to improve it, but he never altered its intrinsic principles. It was the technique of his forerunners, the good Antwerp painters, especially that of the elder Brueghel, for whom he always expressed a particular predilection. He preserved its vigorous qualities, firm drawing, bold and strong tonalities, with greater suppleness and more delicacy of feeling. His eye was keener, his hand lighter, his taste purer, his sense of decorative harmonies richer and more skilled. Rubens's system was very simple and very methodical. We owe to it the perfect preservation of his works, which, when hung under proper conditions, have not undergone the slightest change. Instead of attacking all the difficulties of the work at once, he divided them into a series of progressive stages, each having its particular use and proper purpose, all helping to the end he had in view. He paid the most careful attention to the purity of his oils and varnishes, to the quality of his colours, panels and canvases. The brilliant freshness of the carnations, the dark or light colours, the transparent shadows that we so greatly admire in his pictures, owe a part of their beauty to the greyish white preparation on which they were painted. The clever restorer, Hauser, who has made a special study of Rubens's pictures, rightly observed that both the colour and the execution of his canvases are colder, less animated, less delicate than those of his panels. A more complete adhesion of the preparation to the wood, a more even and homogeneous surface, sufficiently explains Rubens's preference for panel. He painted on panel the greater number of his sketches, the works to which he wished to give a very careful finish, and sometimes even works of large dimensions, such as the *Raising of the Cross*, which measures 15 ft. 1'18 in. by 11 ft. 2'25 in., and the *Descent from the Cross*, which measures 13 ft. 9'35 in. by 10 ft. 2'04 in.



The vehicle he used was neither too liquid nor too thick; it enabled him either to lay on liquid washes, as in water-colour, or to make his impasto fairly loaded. It did not turn black and it dried quickly. In order to hasten the drying of his pictures, Rubens exposed them to the sun on fine days, sheltering them from the wind to avoid "dust, the enemy of newly painted works."<sup>1</sup> His colours were boldly laid on, and always remained pure and brilliant, in frank juxtaposition rather than in fusion. He contrasted cold with warm tones, especially in the flesh, the contours of which were often indicated by a line of pure vermilion. The bright tones of the light were contrasted with the bluish tones of the shadow, brought together by a pearly medium tone between the two. While the master always remained faithful to this method of procedure, he gave it, with time, greater ease and suppleness, and obtained better effects with less effort. His shadows became more transparent, his reflected lights bolder in their freshness, his scale of colour clearer and sunnier. He usually introduced a very bold black and white that mark the extremes, as if he desired to make us appreciate the moderation of the middle tone he managed so admirably.

In his treatment of his subject, Rubens, after preliminary studies, often of the most summary character—for without much seeking he soon recognised the value of his idea—clearly fixed the composition with a firm stroke. The first drawing formed the framework, and although his arrangements are so varied, each has the necessary conditions of equilibrium in the distribution of the masses, and the expressive silhouette proper to the character of the scene. The clearness of his conceptions is always remarkable; the idea on which he decides always brings out the striking aspects of the episode to be represented. An arrangement once adopted, he never went back upon it. If, in the course of his work, he recognised the advantage of certain important changes, he introduced them in another picture, after turning the original work to the best possible account.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Sir Dudley Carleton, May 26, 1618. In a letter to P. de Vischere, April 27, 1619, Rubens said "that paintings ought to be dried two or three times before they could be brought to perfection." *Correspondance de Rubens*, Vol. II. p. 213.

When he had sketched his work with an outline of bistre, he boldly indicated the effect in the same brown tone ; he regulated the different planes, marked the principal values. But he constructed his picture as much by differences of depth in the colour as by the lights and shadows, with such an accurate instinct for the distribution of the lights and darks, that it amounts to positive science. The colour was then indicated, first by dull, feeble, diluted tones. Rubens thus felt his way, tested the action of the different colours on one another, their happy conjunctions or useful contrasts, their subordination to the general effect and prevailing harmony. The master's combinations are extremely varied ; but as he knew perfectly what he wanted to do, his work is always full of life and freedom. He never overworked his canvas or panel ; he let the ground appear, and preserved the perfect spontaneity of his inimitable execution. His touch, at once broad and delicate, is always appropriate to the modelling of the objects, to the rendering of their substance. The frank local tone is enlivened by luminous high lights and bold reflections, which serve as a bond between the different colours. The master knew the properties of each colour, those which approximate and those which repel ; the method of contrasting them, or of enhancing their value by means of neutral tones calculated to give greater freshness, depth, or brilliance. All this seems very complicated, but as a matter of fact, it may be reduced to a small number of fixed doctrines, the simplicity of which leaves much to the painter's initiative, and to the personal discoveries he may make in the course of his work. The method, very logical in itself, was always animated by an alert intelligence. In thus decomposing the successive phases of the work, it had the further advantage of leaving each its special interest, and of providing the artist with a tempting task at every turn. His astonishing vivacity, and the abundance of his production, are the result of a methodical discipline which allowed him to despatch the heaviest tasks promptly.

Everything conspired to give him a good position on his return to his native country. His talent and fame had preceded him. During his absence the country had been pacified, and religion had revived. Numerous churches had been built into which the light entered

freely ; it seemed as if their spacious walls were waiting for him to adorn them with his canvases, to display his pictures in a good light ; as if he had returned just at the right moment to furnish the oratories and galleries with decorations, and to paint the portraits of the great Spanish or Flemish nobles, whose favour was soon won by his charm of manner, person, and conversation. The archdukes were anxious to attach him to their service, but fearing the vicinity of the court, he obtained leave to reside at Antwerp, where he could preserve the freedom necessary for the practice of his profession. He made a marriage of inclination, and soon installed himself in a magnificent house suited to his needs, which he never ceased to adorn with all that could delight his eyes, stimulate his intellect, or serve his talent. He then began to study nature more carefully and individually. Until now, except in technique, he had been more than half Italian ; he now began to recognise the rich field of observation and study offered by the picturesque town in which he lived, its atmosphere, the life of its streets and harbour, the varied types to be met there, its porters, and boatmen, its plump, bright-complexioned women. He was more and more attracted and riveted by it ; gradually he freed himself from Italian reminiscences, from the black shadows and harsh tones of Caravaggio. He grew more supple ; he saw with his own eyes, and became more original, in proportion as he was more frankly inspired by the sentiments and types of his native land. He was even infected by the taste for allegory and subtleties that he had found in Italy, but which was far more wide-spread, more affected and more fantastic in Flanders. As the policy of her governors was made up of compromises and accommodations, so was his painting a compromise between the art of the north and that of the south. It was at once appreciated by the clergy, to whom he lent the seductions of his decorative sense for a worship that sought outward show. He did more than fall in with these tendencies, he assisted them, and as his art delighted both the cultured and the uneducated, he speedily became popular. Commissions so numerous and important flowed in, that despite his energy and promptitude, he could not accomplish them unaided. But pupils also flocked to him, and he soon made use of

which he had already engaged in response to the Infanta's desire, offered a means of distraction from his grief. He yielded to the Archduchess's solicitations, although he did not expect that his grief would be much lessened by absence from home. But once embarked on diplomacy, the confidence he inspired, the services he rendered, as well as the wish to enforce his ideas, kept him employed for some time. But he soon recognised the emptiness of such a life, so little in conformity with his tastes and his activities. "He had had enough of courts," although he had won the favour of Marie de' Medici, triumphed over the formal reserve of Philip IV., and completely fascinated Charles I. The honours lavished on him, although he was by no means indifferent to them, were no compensation for the wasted days, the intrigues amid which he had to steer his course, his neglected profession, the home that he regretted more and more. At length, overcome by weariness and disgust, he hurried back to Antwerp, to his home, his friends, his sons, the regular labours of each day. No sooner had he returned to his empty house, than he felt the need of once more making a home for himself; although on the threshold of old age, he was fascinated by the charms of a young girl whom he loved with all the ardour of youth. This belated passion was perhaps a mistake; in any case, it was in contradiction with all his practical wisdom and principles of conduct. But however disproportionate the union, it made his last years perfectly happy. From the point of view of his art, it produced many brilliant master-pieces in the numerous portraits of his second wife and in the compositions she inspired; it would then be scarcely seemly for us to complain of what constituted his happiness. This was, in fact, the most brilliant period of his talent, a period of light and life, of an epopee of *Feasts of the Flesh: Bacchanals, Gardens of Love, and Offerings to Venus*, of which Helena was the heroine.

His talent was never more lively, his colour more joyous or blooming, his compositions more unrestrainedly lyrical, his handling more marvellously subtle, sure, or full of expression. He learned to love Nature more and more, and in the decline of life, racked by pain, at an age when other men live in their past, repeat themselves, or

grow careless, he was still learning, still, as it were, renewing himself, and painting his radiant landscapes in the retirement of Steen. But the attacks of the illness from which he suffered became more frequent and painful; he struggled against them and with indomitable courage painted as much as ever he could. When he saw death approaching he met it with a lucid mind and undaunted courage, with Christian resignation, and the brave stoicism of those sages of antiquity he knew so well. To the end he occupied himself with the welfare of his family, with their future, with the good feeling he wished to preserve among them, carefully regulating the details of his funeral and noting the souvenirs he wished his friends to have.

Thus passed and ended this noble, happy life, in itself a masterpiece. Rubens, always a friend to order and regularity, arranged his life according to their precepts. He performed his duties faithfully, preserving simple habits and moderate desires at the height of fortune, and always respectful of traditions and established law. He was a devout Catholic and a loyal subject, devoted to his rulers and serving them with all his might. He was too intelligent not to see their faults; but he does not note them or dilate on them to his friends in a factious spirit. He deploras them because he feels that they detract from their authority, that their position is lowered by the abuses committed in their name, by the violence and injustice of which he foresaw the consequences. Nothing is more hateful to him than chicanery, disputes and war: his deeds and his letters protest against them with an eloquence and ardour to be sought in vain in his contemporaries. His dream of a golden age pre-supposed security and peace, the free development of the nation's active forces, then wasted in barren murderous struggles, in the direction of productive labour. His aspirations were for inward peace, a well-balanced mind, always master of itself, the power to be of use and to devote himself to worthy tasks. These desires were summed up in a few maxims of ancient ethics that he not only carried in his heart, but had conspicuously engraved on the walls of his house, maxims which he proposed as precepts to the Archduke Ferdinand in the decorations and devices of the arches erected in honour of his triumphal entry into Antwerp.

In his art as in his life he was steady, reasonable, practical. Neither wealth nor honours could turn his head, and his virtuosity never carried him away. The enthusiasm, the lyrical quality that we so greatly admire in him, was never the result of chance or of momentary exaltation, subject to great successes or profound failures. His spontaneity was the result of hard work and the deliberate employment of every kind of resource combined with a marked vocation and incessant study. There are artists, and they are not the least celebrated, who seem to some extent irresponsible, who outside the studio are like overgrown children, without experience of life, following haphazard everything that attracts them, men of few ideas, which they are often incapable of expressing except with brush or chisel, deficient in reasoning power, exposed to every dupe, passing in turn from overweening self-confidence to the lowest depth of despair, uneasy natures, guided purely by instinct, calculated to lead the public astray by persuading it that irregularity in ideas and conduct is one of the necessary conditions of the artistic profession. Between Rubens and such characters there is a wide gulf. The story of his life proves how greatly reason, a well-regulated mind, habits of wisdom and morality, enter into the composition of such genius as his, what education can add to nature and how great is the influence of a strong will on a man's destiny. Rubens's genius is always conscious. He knew himself well and invariably worked with due regard to his aptitudes and temperament. He walked with even step and, always advancing, sufficed for all his tasks, free alike from the exaggerated illusions and the periodical depression of less well-balanced natures. He produced with facility, without the lengthy periods of preparation artists of less vigorous temper impose on themselves. He had a desire to create, to breathe life into the innumerable subjects called up by his imagination. He saw quickly and clearly the prominent features of the subject he fixed on; but instead of waiting to give a definitive form to the first draft, he promptly set to work with all the vivacity of his impressions, with the delight in painting revealed in every one of his works. He did not consider that he had exhausted a subject that pleased him in one picture; he surveyed it from all points, returned

to it and multiplied representations of it without fearing that he should repeat himself.

It is not surprising that with his fertility of invention, and his superabundant production, Rubens should have his defects, that he should sometimes lack taste and proportion. His monsters are often more absurd than terrible; his allegories, more subtle than beautiful, have neither the sobriety nor the style to which the great Italians have accustomed us. Some of his figures are of excessive triviality, and might be suppressed with advantage; others present themselves in strange accoutrements, overladen with attributes, or shamelessly display their exuberant rotundities. The muscularities of his Hercules verge on caricature, and he represents *Charity* and *Nature* in the ugliest guise, with two rows of breasts, placed one above the other. Delacroix, who so greatly admired him, admitted these defects; not only, however, to absolve him, but to derive a pretext from them for even greater admiration. "What a magician!" he said.<sup>1</sup> "I am sometimes angry with him and quarrel with his coarse forms, his lack of refinement and elegance. But how he rises above the small qualities that are the whole baggage of the others! Rubens does not correct himself, and he does well." And as if this were not enough, and he had to ask pardon of himself for such gentle criticism of some of Rubens's defects, Delacroix hastened to add: "I notice that his chief quality, if it is necessary to put one before another, is his extraordinary vividness, that is to say, his extraordinary life. There is no great artist without this gift. . . . Titian and Veronese are lifeless beside him."<sup>1</sup> The eulogy is just, save for the last words, which betray an excessive partiality. With more justice and reason, Delacroix, in his enthusiasm, might have declared that Rubens's pictures surpass all the others in the galleries in freshness and brilliance;

<sup>1</sup> *Journal d'Eugène Delacroix*, October 21, 1860.

<sup>1</sup> Delacroix's passionate admiration for Rubens increased with years. One of our common friends, M. Charles Cournauld, told me that when Delacroix went to Champrosay, it was his custom to take with him a portfolio of engravings chosen at the last moment as likely to be useful for consultation during his residence in the country. Towards the end of his life, these engravings were mostly reproductions of Rubens's works, instinctively and almost unconsciously selected.

proximity to him makes others appear dull and smoky. It does not suffice to say that he was a colourist. It is true that he sometimes regarded colour as a purely decorative element, and troubled little about the relation of the colour to the subject it depicted. Sometimes, even, it seems to give the lie to the subject, so much does it contradict it; sad when it is gay, joyous, or at least indifferent, when it is serious. But the concord is perfect in his best works, and his harmony is not only a delight to the eyes, but an element of interest and expression, that only Titian possessed in like degree. Monochromatic, austere in the *Communion of St. Francis*, desolate in the *Raising of the Cross* and the *Descent from the Cross*, dramatic and vigorous in the *Coup de Lance*, oriental and magnificent in the *Adoration of the Magi*, truly regal in the *Coronation of Marie de' Medici* and the *Prosperity of the Regency*, noble and restrained in the *St. Ambrose*, variegated and rustic in the *Kermesse*, or tender and elegant in the *Garden of Love*, colour in Rubens's hands takes on a richness and variety of effect which reveal the fertility and suppleness of his genius. What we say of his colour we say with equal justice of his method of composition, of his drawing, of his touch, of the perfect accord in him of all the resources by which the art of painting produces an impression. His best works, when they have attracted you at a distance, hold you, fascinate you, penetrate you, until they become a part of you. There are subjects that we only see through his eyes, feminine figures whose nobility, grace, or touching poetry he has embalmed, such as the Marie de' Medici in the *Marriage Ceremony*, the Mary Magdalene in nearly all the episodes in which she plays a part, and Helena Fourment in the many portraits he painted of her, or in the pictures she inspired.

Universality is the prominent characteristic of Rubens's genius, and we may be permitted to find in him a sort of Flemish Leonardo. His production is the most abundant, and his field of activity the vastest to be found in the history of painting. Because he covered much ground, it has been said that he lacked depth. Many of his works, as we have seen, are a protest against such an assertion. Rubens's intelligence and eager desire for knowledge enabled him to understand and express everything, not in an undecided confused fashion, but



with a firm, individual touch. He may be accused sometimes of exaggeration, but never of vagueness or ambiguity. He always relied on Nature, and was capable of extreme simplicity; some of his works are worlds in their accumulation of diverse beings, life, and passion. His sure and agile method of expression gave his creations the charm of spontaneity that is to be found in the works of Nature itself.

One of the last representatives of great art vanished with Rubens, When he died, in the fulness of his glory, the greater number of his friends had gone before him, or were soon to follow him, to the grave. The only artist of his land, who, although he did not equal him, may be placed after him, Van Dyck, died in London on December 9, 1641. The successive loss of these two masters left the Flemish school without a leader.

But the fame and influence of Rubens has increased with the ages. The English school profited greatly by his teaching; the best landscapes of Gainsborough, and even of Constable, owe as much to Rubens as to Nature. In France, where at first he had many detractors, his influence has not been less. De Piles, his apologist, writing to Philip Rubens, the master's nephew, speaks of the opinion "of mediocre painters who have vainly tried to destroy the impression produced by his book, the greater number without having read it, but only to win M. Le Brun's favour, who could not see it without envy, and who seeks to instil all the aversion that he feigns to have for Rubens's works, into the Academy of Painting, of which he is the head; for," added De Piles, "I think that at the bottom of his heart he does them justice."<sup>1</sup> Le Brun did them more than justice; unconsciously perhaps, he imitated them awkwardly enough in his stiff, declamatory pictures, and more happily in the truly magnificent creations of a decorative art of which he was the stately inspirer, an accompaniment to the existence and the court of Louis XIV. After Le Brun, Watteau, an artist to the core, more essentially a painter than any other of the French painters, never tired of copying Rubens; this beneficent intercourse developed in him those qualities of facility and elegance of which Boucher and Fragonard were the less dis-

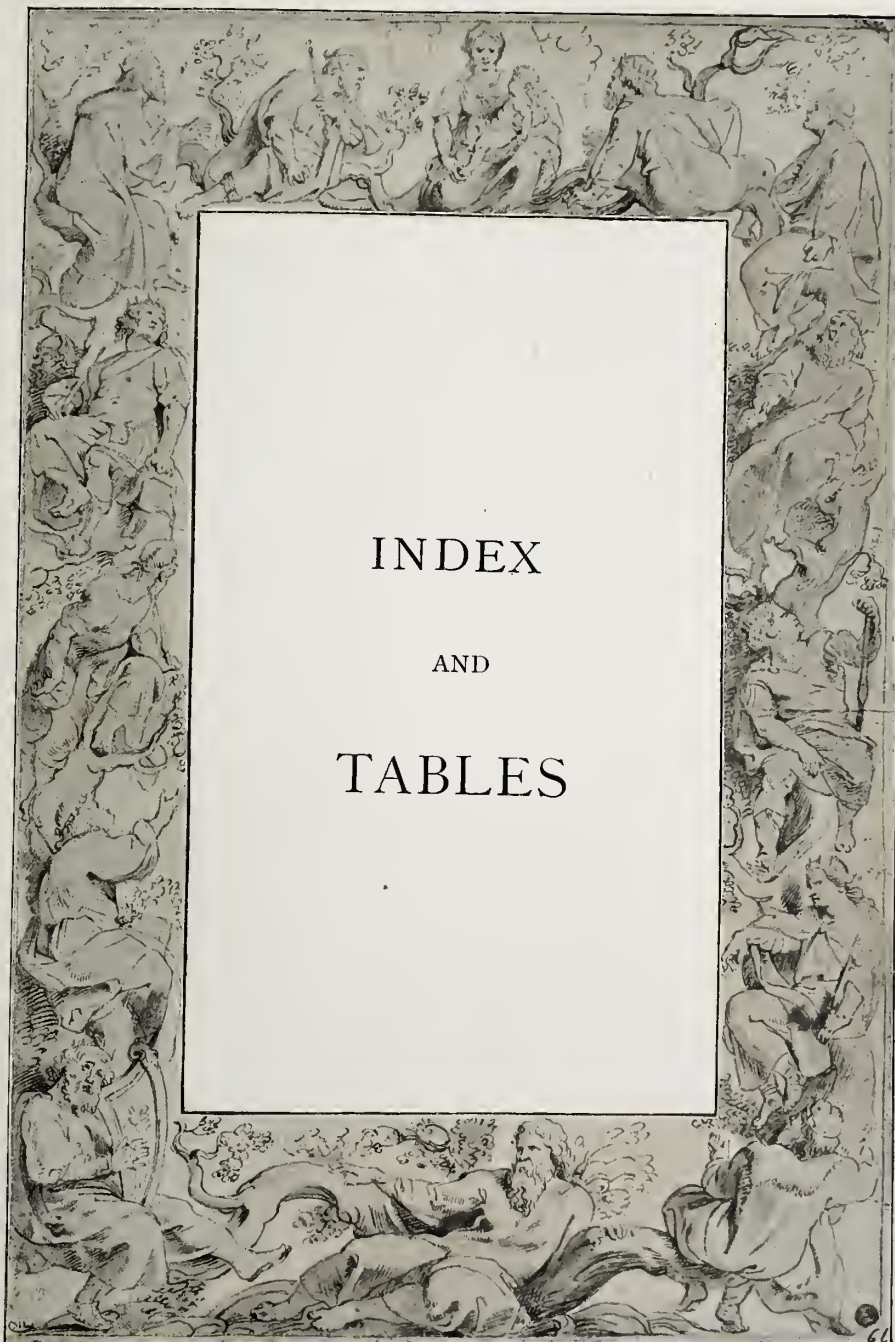
<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin Rubens*, Vol. II. p. 173.

tinguished inheritors. We have already referred to Eugène Delacroix's passionate enthusiasm for Rubens, an enthusiasm to which his works as well as his writings testify. In our own time Fromentin, in the exquisite pages he devotes to the master, has, in his turn, helped us to understand Rubens, by describing in eloquent words of admiration some of the great works that his country has preserved. What more brilliant or salutary example than this incessant and fertile energy could he have put before the artists of our time? As for us, in taking leave of this great figure to whom we should have wished to pay worthier homage, we shall be satisfied if we have given some idea of so vast a genius, so alert an intelligence, so well filled and regular a life, a life that does honour to the human race by the gifts with which it was endowed, and the use it made of them.



PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL.

(Albertina Collection.)



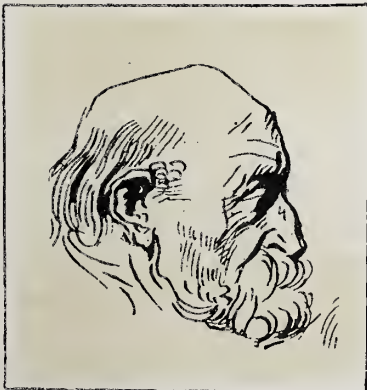
THE TREE OF DAVID (DESIGN FOR THE MISSALE ROMANUM).  
(The Louvre.)





STUDY FROM NATURE.  
(The Louvre.)

## THE WORK OF RUBENS.



WE have already stated that the limits of this book preclude a complete catalogue of Rubens's works. But in the course of it we have endeavoured to mention those pictures which we considered the most important and characteristic. We must refer those of our readers who desire a detailed enumeration of them to M. Max Rooses's valuable work, confining ourselves to a list of the collections and buildings which contain the most notable of Rubens's productions.

### BELGIUM.

Antwerp.—Cathedral of Notre Dame: the *Descent from the Cross*, the *Raising of the Cross*, the *Assumption of the Virgin*. Church of St. Jacques (in the Rubens Chapel): the *Virgin and Saints*. Museum: the triptych

of *Christ à la Paille*, the *Coup de Lance*, the *Adoration of the Magi*, the *Communion of St. Francis*, the *Education of the Virgin*, and the sketch for the *Chariot of Calloo*. On the ground floor of the Museum there is the most complete existing collection of engraved and photographic reproductions of Rubens's works.

Brussels.—Museum: the *Adoration of the Magi*, the *Ascent of Calvary*, the *Martyrdom of St. Liévin*, the *Portraits of Jean and Jacqueline de Cordes*. The Royal Palace: the *Miracles of St. Benedict*, and the *St. Theresa*.

Alost.—Church of St. Roch: *St. Roch praying for the Plague-stricken*.

Ghent.—Church of St. Bavon: the *Conversion of St. Bavon*.

Mechlin.—Church of Notre Dame: the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*. Church of St. Jean: triptych of the *Adoration of the Magi*.

#### GERMANY.

Berlin.—Museum: the *Raising of Lazarus*, *St. Sebastian*, *St. Cecilia*, *Neptune and Amphitrite*, *Perseus and Andromeda*, *Diana hunting a Stag*, *One of Rubens's Children*.

Cassel.—Museum: the *Flight into Egypt*, the *Hero crowned by Victory*, *Jupiter and Calisto*, *Diana Hunting*, the *Virgin receiving the homage of several Saints*.

Dresden.—Gallery: *St. Jerome in the Desert*, the *Drunken Hercules*, the *Old Woman with the Brasier*, the *Boar-Hunt*, and several portraits.

Munich.—The universality of Rubens's genius can best be appreciated in the Munich Gallery. It contains the largest number of the master's pictures, most of them in excellent preservation, and among them are some of his masterpieces in divers styles. We must be content to mention: the *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, the *Fall of the Damned*, the two *Last Judgments*, *Samson and Delilah*, the *Defeat of Sennacherib*, *Susanna and the Elders*, *Jesus Christ and the four Repentant Sinners*, the *Massacre of the Innocents*, *St. Christopher and the Hermit*, the *Battle of the Amazons*, the *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, *Diana Sleeping*, *Faun and Satyr*, *Procession of Silenus*, Sketches for the Medici Gallery, the *Dying Seneca*, *Children carrying a garland of Fruit*, *Portraits of the Earl and Countess of Arundel*, *Rubens and Isabella Brant*, the *Walk in the Garden*, *Portraits of Helena Fourment*, *Portraits of an old Scholar* and of *Doctor van Thulden*, the *Lion Hunt*, the *Rainbow*, and *Cows in a Landscape*.

#### AUSTRIA.

Vienna.—Gallery: *St. Ambrose and Theodosius*, the *Miracles of St. Francis Xavier*, the *Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola*, the triptych of *St. Ildefonso*, the *Head of Medusa*, the *Offering to Venus*, the *Four Quarters of the Globe*, *Rubens in Old Age*, the *Pelisse*, the *Infant Jesus and St. John*, *Cydon and Iphigenia*. Academy of Fine Arts: *Boreas and Orithyia*, *Tigress suckling her Young*. Liechtenstein Gallery: *Erichthonius in his Cradle*, *History of Decius Mus*, *Albert and Nicholas Rubens*, Sketches for the Henry IV. Gallery, and several portraits, notably that of *Jan Vermoelen*.

Prague.—Count Nostitz's Collection: *Portrait of Spinola*.

## DENMARK.

Copenhagen.—Museum : *Portrait of Yrseelius*.

## SPAIN.

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## FRANCE.

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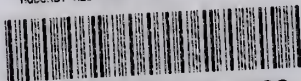
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