

ALBRECHT DÜRER

[1471-1528] GERMAN SCHOOL

PORTRAIT OF A MAN

(THE PRADO, MADRID)



It was the idea of Thausing, Dürer's well-known biographer, that this portrait may represent Hans Imhoff, the great Nürnberg banker. The picture is dated 1521, and is certainly Dürer's finest portrait. In July of that year the artist set forth from Brussels on his return home from the year's visit he had been paying to the Netherlands. Imhoff had been his banker, and the suggestion is that he repaid some overdraft he may have made by painting this picture on his arrival. The suggestion is ingenious, but there are two strong reasons against it. The picture does not very closely resemble an engraving known to be a portrait of Imhoff, and it has an appearance of having been painted in the Netherlands. The handling, indeed, is not Flemish but is Dürer's own, evidently the painting of a man who was an engraver at heart. The traces of the brush are like those of a burin, handled as only Dürer ever handled one. No reproduction of the picture in its present state can give a full idea of the delicacy and finish of the original work as it appeared when it left the master's studio. No portrait by him gives so complete a representation of a man, catching his expression at a moment of mental activity, and pursuing to the uttermost every visible detail of form. We must conclude that the picture was painted in the Low Countries, and so naturally found its way to Spain. The influence of the Flemish style is evident throughout it. Thus John van Eyck taught his followers to see a man, and thus to depict him. In some respects Dürer even bettered the instruction. There is a certain largeness and dignity of view here which is Dürer's own, whatever suggestions he may have taken from others. Perhaps we shall never be able to identify the subject. Assuredly he was a man of note and position, whose name we should recognise quickly enough if someone arose to tell it to us.

SIR ANTHONY VAN DYCK

[1599-1641] FLEMISH SCHOOL

MARIA LUIGIA DE TASSIS

(PRINCE LIECHTENSTEIN'S GALLERY, VIENNA)



HIS sly, substantial beauty is one of the loveliest as well as the most convincingly human of Van Dyck's portraits. He painted her in the very hey-day of his powers, about the year 1630, after his return from Italy and before he settled in England. Maria Luigia was a young lady of distinguished family resident at Antwerp. She is fashionably dressed, according to the then latest French ideas—black satin, white silk, ostrich fan. The local costume of the time was very different—cylindrical ruff, round-ended stomacher, and stiff sleeves. This low neck, this wide-spread lace collar, these fanciful sleeves and long graceful lines were the device of no Antwerp costumier. Anne Marie de Camudio, whose portrait Van Dyck painted in this same year, wore the like, and did her hair in the same fashion as Maria Luigia, but she did not possess the coquettish charms of her younger contemporary. A portrait of another member of the Tassis family also now hangs in the same splendid gallery, of which this picture is a chief treasure. It represents Antonio de Tassis, a Canon of Antwerp, about whom little else seems to be known. Van Dyck, in his Flemish period (1626-1632), unfortunately was not given the opportunity of painting many such beautiful ladies as the one before us. He appears, indeed, not to have been fully employed. At all events, he had leisure to paint portraits of quite a number of his contemporary artists, who are not likely to have paid him for so doing. These artist-portraits, however, done for love, and painted without help of assistants, are amongst the best works that he left behind him. When he went to England his art suffered, partly for lack of criticism from the people by whom he was surrounded, partly because more work was demanded of him than one unassisted artist could produce. Assistants, therefore, did a large part of his English pictures. No assistant touched this portrait of Maria Luigia. It is Van Dyck's own throughout, and Van Dyck at his best.

HANS HOLBEIN

[1497-1543] GERMAN SCHOOL

ROBERT CHESEMAN OF DORMANSWELL

(THE HAGUE GALLERY)



ROBERT CHESEMAN is traditionally described as Henry VIII.'s falconer. Mr. Arthur B. Chamberlain has shown, in his recent "Miniature" Life of Holbein, that he was nothing of the sort. Chese-man, in fact, was a well-to-do gentleman of Middlesex. He was the son of Henry VII.'s "Cofferer and Keeper of the Wardrobe," and succeeded to the family estates in Middlesex and Essex in 1517. He was a Justice of the Peace. He was one of the gentlemen selected to welcome Anne of Cleves when she first landed in England. When Holbein painted his portrait, in 1533, Chese-man was forty-eight years old. The artist never painted a more obviously refined gentleman. It is a remarkable fact that the portraits of men with hawks are so often good. Van Dyck painted a very fine picture of the kind, and several others might be mentioned. Is there something in the cult of hawks that makes for gravity of aspect? Certain it is that this man was a most portrayable person. We might guess him to be a poet, a theologian, a scholar, or, perhaps, even a statesman. Some have thought to read Hamlet into him. Evidently there were all manner of possibilities in the man. The delicacy of his hands, with their finely-pointed fingers, is remarkable. Holbein seldom omitted, and, when he introduced them, never neglected the hands of his sitters. Van Dyck was a great painter of hands, but he fitted his high-born folks with the kind of hands he himself admired. Holbein gave to each the hands that nature had made for him and his life had modified. We possess his careful drawings of Erasmus' hands, studied from the life. The admirable hand of Robert Chese-man was doubtless thus studied also. It is no invention, but as individual as the face, and a manifestation of the same refined character.

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

[1606-1669] DUTCH SCHOOL

PORTRAIT OF A POLISH NOBLE

(HERMITAGE GALLERY, ST. PETERSBURG)



HIS noble portrait, which is signed by the painter and dated 1637, used to be called the portrait of John III. Sobieski, King of Poland, or of Stephan Bathory, King of Poland. It is neither the one nor the other, for in 1637 Sobieski was only twelve or thirteen years old, while Stephan Bathory died in 1586. Dr. Bode, however, has justly pointed out that the man was in all probability a Pole, or at least a Slav, judging not merely by his type and costume, but by the moustache, which in those days was seldom thus worn except by Slavs. The picture must be numbered among the masterpieces of the earlier period of Rembrandt's mature power. While we miss the lightning-like freedom of hand, to which he attained later on,—when he, as it were, flung paint upon his canvas, and made it suggest as by magic whatever objects he desired,—we find already the perfect comprehension of what he chose to depict, the definite knowledge of how much of the thing visible in its entirety the artist cared to see and to reproduce. Here we have not merely the lineaments and form of a man set down, we have an integral vision of him: character, costume, expression, pose,—all in harmony, all concentrated into one consistent, visual image; everything omitted that is outside of that, nothing omitted, nothing distorted, that comes within it. The man is a sort of barbarian, "Hot as ginger, a fractious chiel," impatient, a bad sitter one would judge. Each time he came to sit he brought a new stick with him and insisted upon having the former painted out and the new one substituted. The traces of two thus painted over can still be discovered on the canvas. Like Rembrandt himself he loved jewels, gold ornaments, rich furs, and costly attire, and he came to the right artist for painting them. One hopes with some confidence that the picture pleased him. Was he capable of appreciating the bold, and at the same time spiritual, handling of the brush? Hardly; but the wonderful effect of light must have struck him, and the transfiguring of his face by it may well have pleased him, and gratified his obvious self-satisfaction.

The picture was acquired by the Empress Catherine II. of Russia, and is happily at home in the collection of which it has ever since formed part.

JAN STEEN

[1626-1676] DUTCH SCHOOL

THE ARTIST'S PORTRAIT

(EARL OF NORTHBROOK'S COLLECTION)



HERE behold the veritable aspect, at a characteristic moment, of that most joyous, irresistible, irresponsible of men—Jan Steen, brewer, publican, and immortal artist. A brave drinker, we gather him to have been, but his 500 remarkable pictures, solidly and masterly painted within the limits of 30 years, are proof that he was no habitual drunkard, passing days and nights under the fuddling dominion of drink. From his existing pictures we can calculate that on the average he must have painted not less than one in three weeks. If we had only them to judge by we might well conclude that his time was fully occupied and that little leisure can have remained to him for amusement. Yet, after the lying manner of literature in its relation to artists, almost all that is recorded of him is a series of tales of royal sprees and reckless jollities. Who that looks upon this his image can doubt the magnificence of his almost Gargantuan festivity of nature? To that side of his character he assuredly gave play. What a crime it would have been if he had not! But if he did drink and frolic and jest in his ample fashion, he did not sacrifice his powers as an artist to his genius as a boon companion. His wife was the daughter of one of his masters in painting—the great Jan van Goyen. He tripped into marriage with her in the casual way he did everything. His father set them up with a brewery at Delft, which did not prove a prosperous venture. Then they tried keeping a tavern, where Jan was his own best customer. Meanwhile he painted the life that he saw around him, painted it magnificently, and sold his pictures for a small price. For one of his best paintings more money would probably be paid to-day than he earned by his brush in his whole career. When the tavern cellar was empty he took a picture over to the wine-dealer and exchanged it for liquor. Once he had sold a picture for some gold pieces, which the wife would gladly have laid hands on, but he went off and drank or lost them at play, and came laughing home. No man ever faced an angry wife more fearlessly. He was not well received, but with resistless mirth he soon obtained the mastery. Truly there was no doing anything with him. The flood of life flowed too strongly within him for anyone to rule, least of all himself. It takes all sorts of people to make a world. Let us be thankful for such as Jan Steen when they come—alas! too rarely.