

TITIAN AND TINTORETTO.

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“ I saw in Venice
The truest test of the good and beautiful.
First, in my judgment, ever stands that school
And Titian first of all Italian men is.”
Velasquez.

ALTHOUGH not a native of Venice, it is with that city that we usually associate Titian, and then we remember that two of the artists we have lately been studying also worked in that place of waterways.

Like the elder of the two, Carpaccio, little is known of the early days of Titian, except that he was the second son of Gregorio Vecelli, and was born about 1477, at Pieve, in Cadore, the family removing ten years later to Venice where Titian at once began his artistic training under Zuccati, and afterwards with the brothers Bellini.

We learnt that the art of Carpaccio was much influenced by the splendour and magnificence which prevailed at that time in Venice, then the centre of the world's trade and the meeting place of many peoples. Great public processions and spectacular displays of every kind were eagerly welcomed by Venetians of every class, and the feasts of colour thus provided afforded food for many an artist's canvas.

For the Venetian school of painting is distinguished by the importance paid to the harmony of colour, rather than to form, though the latter was by no means neglected. Titian could not therefore fail to be influenced by the wonderful scenes around him, scenes so different from the rugged Dolomite country in which he had gained his first impressions. But the human influence in his early works was due to Giorgione, whose very technique Titian so slavishly copied, that to-day it is often difficult to distinguish his early portraits from those of his master.

While studying Dürer's works, we read of his visit to Venice in 1506, to undertake commissions for the adornment of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the German house of commerce, which was then being built to take the place of one destroyed the

[p 693]

previous year by fire. Giorgione and Titian were both also employed to decorate the same building, and we can at any rate imagine the interest with which the artists of the different countries would regard each other's work.

A severe outbreak of plague in Venice in 1510 drove Titian to Padua, where, like Giotto, he executed some frescoes; on returning home some two years later he found that Giorgione was dead of plague, and that the old artistic circle was quite broken up. He fell now somewhat under the influence of Palma Vecchio, during which period he painted, amongst others, “Baptism of St. John,” “Three Ages,” “Sacred and Profane Love.”

Much of Titian's time during the next few years was spent in scheming to obtain the post of official painter to the State, in which he was eventually successful, though it is regrettable to notice that he did not discharge his duties at all conscientiously.

Portraits and fancy portraits, however, he executed with considerable rapidity, and Alfonso, of Ferrara, showered commissions upon him, though Titian never unduly hurried himself to fulfil them. Various churches in Venice were at this time enriched by great altar-pieces from his hand.

In 1523, began a friendship with the Duke of Mantua, which lasted till the Duke's death, nearly twenty years later, and through which Titian obtained many commissions, and an introduction to the Duke of Urbino. In 1530, at Bologna, the artist met Charles V., who sat to him for his portrait on more than one occasion, granted him the title of Count Palatine, and tried to persuade him to accompany the Court of Spain.

During these years, the City of Venice had been quite neglected, till in 1537, the Signoria being angry, threatened to make Titian refund all the money he had drawn from his office. The result was the completion of the famous "Battle of Cadore," unfortunately destroyed by fire some forty years later.

After this, Titian employed himself with various pictures for churches and buildings in Venice, until in 1543, when nearly seventy years old, he journeyed to Rome, where he proved that his skill was in no wise diminished, by such works as

[p 694]

"Pope Paul III., with his Grandsons," "Danae," "Venus with the Lute-player," and others. After a stay of eight months, Titian returned home, only to journey again to the Court of Charles V., at Augsburg, where he was employed in painting many portraits of the House of Hapsburg.

His last years were spent in Venice, always busily employed, though he had to let his pupils do more and more of his work, until in August, 1576, during an epidemic of plague, the greatest Master of Venice, now nearly a hundred years old, fell a victim, and was buried in the Church of the Frari, as he had himself desired. His grave went unmarked until in 1852, a monument dedicated by the Emperors Ferdinand and Franz Joseph, was erected over the spot to his memory.

Jacopo Robusti, an ardent admirer of Titian, was just forty years his junior, being born about 1518, in Venice. His father was a dyer, "tintore," hence the son's nickname Tintoretto (little dyer), and in very early days Jacopo showed signs of distinct artistic talent. He was placed in Titian's studio, but remained only ten days, that master refusing to undertake his training. All sorts of motives have been suggested for this sudden dismissal, but probably the most correct is that Titian recognized the individuality of the boy, and the fact that he could never be a pupil in the true sense of the word. For this is essentially characteristic of Tintoretto, he was above all his own master, though he studied very attentively Michael Angelo's form and Titian's colour. Like Titian, he was a tremendous worker, though he was thirty years old before he received a commission of any importance—a picture for the Scuola di San Marco which depicted "The Miracle of St. Mark," but did not meet with unqualified approval.

Tintoretto's career is a singularly uneventful one, and a marked contrast to Titian's. Tintoretto scarcely ever left Venice, he had no princely patrons, he was indifferent to wealth, and his life, for the sake of his art, was spent in the most retired manner. He married Faustina, about whom little is known, and by whom he had three children. The second, a girl, named Marietta, worked with her father and became a celebrated portrait painter, and the youngest, Domenico, was, at his father's death, one of the leading artists of the city.

[p 695]

Perhaps the most striking work in Tintoretto's life is his decoration of the Scuola and Church of S. Rocco, for which he did at least fifty-two paintings, all admirably suited for the dusky light in which they were to be hung. Numerous works were also painted for the Ducal Palace of Venice, and after the great fire there in 1577, Tintoretto and Paulo Veronese worked side by side to adorn the new building. It was for this that the former executed his colossal "Paradise," in size seventy-four feet by thirty, after which he does not appear to have undertaken any work of note. He died of fever on the last day of May, 1594, and was buried beside his daughter Marietta, in the Church of S. Maria dell 'Orto.

The four works of Titian to be studied this term represent him in as many different moods, though his subjects may be said to fall under three heads, portraits, religious, and classical themes.

"The Tribute Money," painted probably in 1514, for the Duke of Ferrara, is a wood panel, traditionally said to have been executed to show the Germans that exactness of detail could be produced without the excessive minutiae of Dürer's work. This is in every respect a picture of antithesis, the perfect in contrast with the ignoble.

The head of Christ is probably an idealized portrait of Giorgione, and the fair complexion, refined features, and wonderful dark hair throw up sharply the tanned skin, and rugged face of the publican. The calm dignified expression on Christ's face emphasizes the evil of the publican's, seen in the lines round his mouth and the corner of the narrow cunning eye. The hands too, are used to heighten the contrast, and are almost as telling in their effect as the two faces. Titian has been at some pains to make this picture exact in every way, for the coin is a Roman denarius, and the figure on it resembles Tiberius. Duke Alfonso's motto on his coinage was Christ's reply to the publican, "Render unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's, and unto God the things which be God's," which may have been one of Titian's reasons for choosing this subject.

"St. Christopher" is an example of Titian's skill as a fresco worker. Owing to the peculiar situation of Venice, such a means of execution was not general, as the dampness [p 696]

soon affected the plaster, and the picture literally peeled off. This fresco is on a wall in the Doge's Palace, and was commissioned by the Doge Andrea Gritti, for whom Titian also adorned the Church of Saint Nicholas, in the Palace. This "St. Christopher" may be classed with the "St. Sebastian," in the altar-piece in San Nazaro, in Brescia, for in both Titian aims at representing supernatural strength, and though he achieves his aim, a physical, but in no wise spiritual impression is all that the beholder carries away.

"In the figure of St. Christopher, preternatural strength was justified by the theme, and the sweet half-playful relation between the Child Christ, and the giant on whose back He is fearlessly sitting, delights the beholder. Nevertheless, we can scarcely regret that Titian did not repeat such attempts at excessive development of form." (Gronau.)

"Presentation of the Virgin." This is another religious subject, but on a much more elaborate scale. It was commissioned by the Scuola della Carita, and now hangs on the wall for which it was originally painted, the tops of two doors by which the wall is pierced cutting into the canvas.

The elaborate architecture with its balconies, pillars, and ornate capitals is relieved by the trees, clouds, and craggy peaks of the landscape, recalling the Cadore country of the artist's

birth, in contrast with the surroundings in which he then worked. At the top of a flight of steps stands the High Priest in his robes of office, attended by priests, and an acolyte holding a Prayer Book. Half way up pauses the Virgin, in shimmering blue, holding her dress in one hand, while below, a crowd watches her. We can distinguish the stately figure of Anna with a friend pointing towards the Child, Joachim with his back turned, addressing a woman who presses forward, a girl and an old man leaning on the steps, while in front of Joachim, a child and dog play together.

The group on the left seems a little detached from the subject, for it is obviously composed of portraits. The nearer of the first two men is Paolo dei Franceschi, Grand Chancellor of Venice, while his companion is Alvise Mocenigo, Doge at the time of the Battle of Lepanto. Behind are two more portraits, while in the rear a man gives alms to a woman holding a baby, probably in allusion to the name of the Scuola. An old woman

[p 697]

selling eggs and poultry has a distinct value in the composition of the picture, and is said to resemble Michael Angelo's "Cumæan Sibyl." Titian observes the traditional design for this subject, established by the earlier Venetian school, and it is interesting to compare it with pictures of the same subject by Cima, Carpaccio, Tintoretto, and others.

"Charles V." This portrait was painted at Augsburg in 1548, and depicts the Emperor "on the horse he rode, and in the armour he wore on the day when he won the battle in the Saxon land." (Aretino.)

"From the left, where a lofty group of trees closes the picture, the Emperor is riding towards the ford across the Elbe, on a chestnut-coloured Andalusian charger, in his armour inlaid with gold, with a lance in his right hand. The scarf he wears over his breastplate and the feathers on his helmet are red; the charger is also caparisoned in red. His pale countenance gleams from beneath his helmet. The surrounding landscape is just indicated rather than treated with historical faithfulness, and the broad hilly country, with a few isolated trees in the background serves to make the person of the Emperor stand out more brilliantly." (Gronau.)

Charles V. in ordinary life was grave and slow, but such was his love of war that when with his army he became a different man, bright, energetic and showing quite a heroic spirit. So Titian here displays him to the best advantage, as the artist ever strove to do for all his models, though he never descended to mere flattery.

In the Church of S. Giorgio Maggiore to the left of the High Altar hangs one of Tintoretto's most remarkable landscapes.

"The Gathering of the Manna" shows a brook flowing through a mountainous country, studded with thickets and palm trees; the congregation have been long in the wilderness, and are employed in various manufactures, much more than in gathering the manna. One group is forging, another grinding manna in a mill, another making shoes, one woman making a piece of dress, some washing; the main purpose of Tintoretto being evidently to indicate the *continuity* of the supply of heavenly food. Another painter would have made the congregation hurrying to gather it, and wondering at it; Tintoretto at once makes us remember that they have been

[p 698]

fed with it "by the space of forty years." It is a large picture, full of interest and power, but scattered in effect, and not striking except from its elaborate landscape." (Ruskin.) Tintoretto is supposed to have drawn his own portrait in the man appearing behind Moses and Aaron in the

right-hand bottom corner. He seems to have painted this large picture for sheer love of the colour of the scene. Blues and reds occupy the chief place in the scheme which resembles that of the second picture.

“St. George and the Dragon.” In the foreground is the terrified princess running away; behind her lies the dead body of a would-be rescuer; while St. George, in armour, charges at a most realistic dragon. The coast line stretches away to the horizon, with a palace in the background, and there is a wonderful light in the sky as of some triumphant angel. St. George’s horse is supposed to recall the horse on the bridge in Titian’s “Battle of Cadore,” though the resemblance cannot be said to be very apparent in the reproduction.

“It has been too often the rule to give to Titian all the honour which he should share with his contemporaries. It is doubtful whether Titian did not himself directly owe much to Giorgione, and in any case it is incorrect to attribute Tintoretto’s mastery to the direct teaching of Titian, or even to any marked extent to his indirect influence. Indeed, it is not unfair to say that the advance in colour from Titian to Robusti is as great as Titian’s own advance upon that of his predecessors. . . In delicacy and beauty of colour, Titian yields to none, although, even in this, Robusti generally equals him. When it comes to the yet more subtle treatment of that colour, as the colour scheme in a whole picture, Titian falls far behind. As a draughtsman or creator of great compositions no one has ever claimed for Titian the foremost place, and we are probably fully justified in saying that in the greatness of ideas, the majesty of his conceptions, and the earnestness of purpose, no man ever approached Jacopo Robusti.” (Stoughton Holborn.)

Books used and quoted, *Titian*—Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Gronau, Phillips, Heath, Vasari, Bensusan, Ruskin. *Tintoretto*—W. R. Osler, Berenson, Ruskin, Stoughton Holborn.