



### Gainsborough.

[With acknowledgments to biographies by Sir Ronald Gower, Sir William Martin Conway, Encyclopædia Britannica, etc.]

To mention Sir Joshua Reynolds almost necessitates that one mention Thomas Gainsborough in the next breath. All but together they stand—indeed, some art critics would place them side by side—as the greatest masters of the English school of portraiture, while in landscape painting, which Reynolds did not care to touch, Gainsborough holds a place but little less eminent.

Gainsborough was born in 1727, at Sudbury, the son of a crape-maker, and, like the majority of artists, gave evidence of his talent at a very early age. At ten, it is recorded, he "had sketched every fine tree and picturesque cottage" within reach of his home, and had filled not only the blank spaces of his own school-books with caricatures of the school-master, but also those of his school-mates, who, for such good service, gave return by working his arithmetic problems for him. Upon one occasion, while sitting in an orchard, pencil in hand, a thief placed his hands on top of the wall and drew himself above it for a moment. In that brief space of time young Gainsborough sketched the man's features, painting them the same night on a bit of board with such fidelity that the man was recognized and arrested. This picture he called "Tom Peartree."

No check appears to have been placed upon the development of the lad's talent. Indeed, his mother, who herself excelled in flower-painting, encouraged him in every possible way, and many were the sketching tours which he made about the wooded hills and tranquil valleys of the neighborhood. "Suffolk," he often said in later life, "made me an artist," but the credit cannot wholly be laid to that beautiful district. There was, indeed, a streak of unusual cleverness in the whole Gainsborough family. One of his brothers invented the sun-dial, and anticipated Watt in the conception of a steam engine; another tried to invent flying machines; hence it is not surprising to find that young Thomas was also possessed of an originality that must needs find expression, and he, as it chanced, became the most illustrious of all.

At fourteen he was sent up to London to learn engraving, and there, before long, he obtained admission to St. Martin's Lane Academy. At eighteen he returned to Sudbury, "uncommonly good-looking, with refined features and singularly brilliant eyes,"—tall, fair, handsome, generous, impulsive, a lively talker, quick at repartee,—in short, just such a youth as might easily win the heart of pretty Margaret Burr, sister of one of the workmen in his father's crape-shop, to whom he was married before two years more had passed.

The marriage proved to be a very happy one. Margaret was not only pretty, but of unusually sweet disposition. Moreover, she was the recipient of a life annuity of £200, an oiling to the wheels of the domestic machinery which was by no means to be despised. There was, as a matter of fact, a mystery about the birth of Miss Burr, and popular report had it that she was really the daughter of an exiled prince,—hence the £200 annuity.

After living in Sudbury for six months, the young couple moved to Ipswich and started housekeeping in a small house that cost but £6 a year rental, where Gainsborough set up as portrait painter. His love for nature, however, took him often to the fields, and many a sketching tour did he make along the windings of the Orwell with his friend Kirby (afterwards drawing-master to the Prince of Wales, and President of the Society

of Artists). He loved the peasantry, and loved to paint them in their usual environment, and many a fine canvas still remains as a result of these rambles, for Gainsborough "gave poetry to the humblest of rustic scenes." A fine favorite he was, too, among these simple, kindly people, for whom he delighted to sing and play and crack his merry jokes. "I have seen the aged features of the peasantry lit up," wrote a contemporary, "with a grateful recollection of his many acts of kindness and benevolence."

A happy, sunny nature, indeed, was Gainsborough's. He was always the first in fun and merry-making, and an ancient inn is still shown in Ipswich in which his wig was often snatched off in the nonsense of merry revels.

But two daughters had been added to the family, and it was necessary to earn more money; accordingly, the Gainsboroughs removed, in 1759, to Bath,

whom those bells so often rang, have sunk into oblivion.

With the removal to Bath, however, the brighter side of the wheel of fortune turned for Gainsborough. It was impossible that a portrait-painter of such wonderful genius as his should long remain unnoticed. In 1760, a Society of Artists was formed, the precursor of the Royal Academy, and to its second exhibit he sent a full-length portrait of a gentleman "who passed his life in seeking lucrative places and courting rich widows." So excellent was this portrait that the artist leaped at once to popularity, and before many days had passed his studio was thronged with fashionable folk willing to pay him almost any price for equally poetical representations of themselves. Nor did those of stronger mental calibre stand aloof, for among those who sat to him were General Wolfe, Sheridan, and Burke, the authors Sterne and Richardson, and

was paid. "There can be but few artistic possessions," says Gower, "which are more to be envied—if the falling is permissible—than one of these beautiful landscape paintings by Gainsborough. Such pictures are a ceaseless joy to those who value the highest expression that English art has attained."

While at Bath, Gainsborough was chosen as one of the thirty-six original members of the Royal Academy. He also practiced music, and learned to play the harp, hautboy, viol-di-gamba, and violoncello. Indeed, at all times music was a passion with him, and it is quite likely that had he not found expression in art, he would have become known as one of the world's eminent musicians.

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In 1774, Gainsborough fell out with Governor Thicknesse, and on the impulse of the moment left Bath and settled in London. Again, however, the change was a happy one. He was now known. Moreover, he was now able to take up his residence in a favorable locality, so he settled in a wing of Schomberg House, Pall Mall, a noble mansion still standing, paying for the portion occupied a rental of £300 a year.

As at Bath, sitters flocked to his studio, and before long he received a summons to the Court. "Henceforth," says a biographer, "he divided with West the favor of the Court, and with Reynolds the favor of the town."

The years were now busier than ever. He painted portraits of George III., of Queen Charlotte and her children, of the polished Lord Chesterfield, of Admiral Rodney, Samuel Johnson, Canning, and many others not less notable.

As of old, he haunted the green-rooms of theaters, painting the actors and actresses, and usually, with his characteristic generosity, presented the portraits to them as soon as finished, as a slight tribute of his gratification in their ability to "delight the world." "It was to be my present to Mrs. Garrick," he wrote to Garrick upon one occasion, in reference to a portrait of the actor for which he did not wish to accept payment,— "and so it shall be, in spite of your blood. . . . I know your great stomach, that you hate to be crammed, but you shall swallow this one bait. . . . God bless all your endeavors to delight the world, and may you sparkle to the last!"

One of his best portraits of this time was the famous "Blue Boy," a portrait of young Master Butall, son of a rich iron-monger, painted in refutation of Reynolds' theory that blue should never be made the leading tone of a picture.

Especially, perhaps, did Gainsborough delight in painting portraits of ladies, "their soft, clear skin, and curling hair, the gloss of silk and fluff of feathers." His portrait of Mrs. Siddons is considered second only to Reynolds' representation of her as the Muse of Tragedy,—notwithstanding his impatient criticism of her, "Madam, there is no end to your nose!"

Among his favorite sitters were the Misses Linley, daughters of a Bath musician, who were renowned for their singing, as well as their beauty. Elizabeth was especially beautiful, and England went wild over her. At eighteen, she had married Sheridan—a runaway marriage—and at thirty-eight she died. It was said that Gainsborough never missed a concert at which she sang.

Another was the fair but notorious Emma Hart, afterwards the famous Lady Hamilton, who for a time before her marriage lived as model to an artist in an adjoining wing of Schomberg House, and yet others were the Duchesses of Devonshire, Georgiana and Elizabeth. One of his portraits of the latter, it may be remembered, was stolen from Messrs.



The Market Cart.

From a painting by T. Gainsborough, R. A.

then a winter resort of wealth and fashion. "All the folly, the wit, the wealth and fashion of London," says Gower, "congregated in the handsome, and then but newly-built Circus, and its adjoining streets and promenades. Sheridan revelled in the humor of the place and in its society, which furnished him with the material for some of his brighter comedies; whilst Miss Burney noted down for use in her next novel the vanities and follies, the gossip and scandal of that frolic crowd." A peal of bells used to welcome the arrival of strangers. There was none for Gainsborough; but to-day may be seen a tablet on the house where he lived, while even the names of the great majority of the fashionable folk for

the actors Quin, Henderson, Foote, and Garrick. The gentlemen of the footlights he found to be not at all easy subjects. "Rot them!" he used to say,—"they have everyone's expression but their own!"

During all of this time, however, Gainsborough never let drop his favorite pastime, landscape painting. He did not expect to sell his landscapes, never but once or twice, indeed, did he so much as take the trouble to sign them, and he scattered them about with a reckless generosity, even giving several masterpieces to a carrier named Willshire, who had refused to accept payment for carrying his pictures to London, and who, possibly, did not realize how highly he