

THE ANONYMOUS MASTERPIECE.

ONE day Rubens, passing through the environs of Madrid, entered a convent of a very strict order, and observed, not without surprise, in the poor and humble chapel of the monastery a picture which represented the death of a monk. This picture was painted in a sublime manner. Rubens called his pupils and shewed them the picture, and all shared his admiration.

"And who can the author of this work be?" asked Van Dyck, the favourite pupil of Rubens.

"A name is written at the bottom of the picture, but it is impossible to decipher it," answered Van Shulden.

Rubens sent to prevail on the Prior to come and speak to him, and asked the old monk the name of the artist to whom his admiration was due.

"The painter is no longer of this world."

"Dead!" cried Rubens; "dead! And no one has known him hitherto, no one has repeated with admiration his name which ought to be immortal, his name before which perhaps mine would be eclipsed. And yet,"—added the artist with a noble pride, "yet, father, I am Paul Rubens."

At this name the grave and pale face of the Prior was animated with an unwonted glow, his eyes sparkled, and he fixed on Rubens looks in which more than curiosity was revealed: but this excitement only lasted for a moment. The monk bent his eyes towards the ground, crossed on his breast his arms, which he had raised towards heaven in a moment of enthusiasm, and repeated,

"The artist is no longer of this world."

"His name, father, his name, that I may tell it to the world, that I may give him the glory which is due to him."

The monk trembled; a cold perspiration flowed from his forehead over his thin cheeks, and his lips were pressed convulsively together, as ready to reveal the mystery of which he possessed the secret.

"His name, his name?" repeated Rubens.

The monk made with his hand a solemn gesture.

"Listen to me," he said, "you did not understand me rightly; I told you that the author of this picture was no longer of this world; but I did not mean that he was dead."

"He lives! He lives! Oh! let us know him! let us know him!"

"He has renounced the things of earth; he is in a cloister, he is a monk."

"A monk, father! a monk! Oh! tell me in what convent; for he must come out. When God marks a man with the seal of genius, that man must not bury himself in solitude. God has given him a sublime mission, he must accomplish it. Tell me the name of the cloister where he is hidden, and I will go and draw him from it, and shew him the glory which awaits him! If he refuses me, I will procure an order from our holy father the Pope for him to re-enter the world and resume his pencil. The Pope loves me, father; the Pope will listen to my voice."

"I shall not tell you either his name, or the cloister where he has taken refuge," replied the monk in a resolute tone.

"The Pope will command you to do so," cried Rubens, exasperated.

"Hear me," said the monk, "hear me, in the name of Heaven. Do you think that this man, before quitting the world, before renouncing fortune and glory, did not struggle powerfully against such a resolution? Do you think that there must not have been bitter deceptions, cruel griefs, for him to have found out at last," said he, striking his breast, "that all here on earth was only vanity? Let him then die in the asylum which he has found against the world and its disappointments. Besides, your efforts will result in nothing; it is a temptation from which he will remain victorious," added he, making the sign of the cross; for God will not withdraw His aid from him; God, who in His pity has deigned to call him to Him will not drive him from His presence."