

The Sistine Madonna.

The story of the original painting of the Sistine Madonna, a copy of which was presented to the old cathedral, Pittsburgh, by Andrew Carnegie, and is now in the new one, may not instantly be given here. It is perhaps the most popular picture in the world; and that is a little singular, too, when we consider that not one person in a hundred fully understands its meaning. Originally it belonged to the Church of San Sisto at Piacenza, Italy. To-day it is in a separate room in the Dresden gallery.

"Raphael was about thirty-six years of age, in the zenith of his power, when the Black Monks of San Sisto at Piacenza asked him to paint for their church a Madonna attended by San Sisto and Santa Barbara. This was the order that produced the Madonna de San Sisto, or, as it is usually called, the Sistine Madonna.

"This picture was to be an altar-piece; and for those who have never been in Italy it is perhaps necessary to say that an altar-piece was a picture placed directly back of the altar and forming a part of it, much as a mirror forms part of a dressing table. During the service the curtains that protected the picture from dust and smoke were looped back at the sides, and the picture was thus revealed.

"It was painted for the high altar and it had to be of large proportions. It measured something like ten feet in height by seven feet in width. The figures in it were life-size, well-rounded, realistic, moving. They could be seen the whole length of the church. And the painter meant that the worshippers in looking at them should believe they saw the real Madonna and Child rather than a painted likeness. Illusions in art are not considered the best motives, but Raphael certainly planned one here; and, as we shall see, he was justified in doing so. His altar-piece taught art, but he saw to it that it should also fulfill its religious purpose and teach the Faith.

"Recall now the picture. The ledge or shelf at the bottom, where the tiara of San Sisto stands and where the two cherubs are poised, is intended to represent a part of the altar-top. That portion of the picture was to fit close up against the back of the altar and give the impression that the tiara and the cherubs are resting on the altar itself. The green curtains at the top, looped up on each side, and originally hung from a pole with rings, are again intended to be the real altar curtains used to screen the altar-piece. These features, all of them in the foreground, are the only objects that are supposed to belong to the church building. The rest of the picture is back of the altar, back of the curtains, on the clouds, in the air. The foreground is terrestrial and material; the background is to be regarded as celestial and spiritual.

"We should understand the intention better, perhaps, were we back in the sixteenth century and in this church at Piacenza during the service. We should then see the darkened recess of the Church, the kneeling body of worshippers, the moving priests; and we should hear the chanted prayers; the voices of the choir sounding from the nave, and the low tones of the responding believers. We should see the high altar lighted by candles; mass is being said, the curtains of the picture are drawn, and, as in response to prayer, the glorious Madonna with the Christ Child in her arms, appears walking down upon the clouds to meet the congregation. The two cherubs, part of the heavenly host about the Madonna, have already arrived and are leaning on the altar-edge, Santa Barbara at the left is kneeling and turning her face away, dazzled and blinded, perhaps afraid to look up at the celestial visitors; and at the right kneels the patron of the Church, San Sisto the martyr, who, all unmindful of himself, is pointing with his finger out towards his people in the Church and beseeching the Madonna to intercede for them to save them. And finally, beyond the Madonna, beyond the saints and the clouds, there is given a glimpse of whence the visitors came. A great aureole made up of the faces of innumerable following cherubs is back of the Madonna. These are rarely discernible in any reproduction. They are clear in the original painting. The throng of these angels seems unending, reaching in waves of radiance from Heaven to earth, and all of them glowing with a strange light never seen before on land or sea—the dawning light of the Eternal Day.

"Such in a brief was the liturgical

significance of this noble altar-piece in its original church-setting at Piacenza.

"In its present home in the Dresden gallery, of course its religious meaning is no longer apparent. The Church with its dim-lighted nave, the altar, the acolytes, the swinging censer and the kneeling worshippers have disappeared; and there is no sound of chanting priest and answering choir echoing down the columned aisles. In their place there is a bare room lighted by side windows and a boxlike structure upon which the picture stands. And now the beautiful Madonna walks down upon the clouds not to meet a kneeling host, but perhaps a group of alleged critics who are wrangling about whether she is an intellectual or a spiritual creation; and now the good San Sisto no longer points out to his beloved people, but possibly to an unbelieving mob of overseas tourists who are standing about making ridiculous remarks and wondering what people can see that is interesting in 'those old Church pictures of the Madonna.'

"Probably there never was a greater desecration of a noble picture than when the Sistine Madonna was taken down from the altar niche where it served religion, and set up in the Dresden gallery, where it serves chiefly civic vanity.

"Still the picture is well preserved in its present resting place, and though its religious import and most of its decorative charm are gone it is still a work of art. People may read into the faces of the characters what fancies they choose, but Raphael's meaning in not far to seek.

"The Child is perhaps conceived as the Hope of the World, and the Madonna is holding Him in her arms—half in awe and half in pride—that the congregation may see Him, may look upon Him, and believing in Him be saved. The look of the face is preternaturally solemn for a child, as though some glimmering of His mission on earth had already made the brow thoughtful. The large round eyes placed wide apart are there again, as with the mother, and the look of mystery and wonder are there also. Both mother and child seem conscious of their destiny, and yet tremble and are afraid. The modelling of the child's figure is unusually fine. He rests easily and gracefully in His mother's arms with a gentle dignity and yet not unchildlike in the action of the bent knee and the little hand clasping the ankle. Truly a superb mother and child whether of Heaven or of earth!

"Santa Barbara, who kneels at the Madonna's left, was a Christian virgin and martyr A.D. 235 under Maximian. The story of her martyrdom can be read in almost any encyclopedia. The tower in which she was imprisoned, shown here symbolically, is seen directly back of her. The Black Monks of Piacenza had chosen her as one of their patron saints, and that is why she appears in this picture. She kneels gracefully with her head turned to one side and face averted. She looks down toward the altar, and is possibly praying for those beyond it who are under her protection. She is of fair complexion and wears a dull green tunic with yellow sleeves, and a red Italian scarf.

"The figure again is substantial but graceful, convincing as to its reality, and effective as a balance to the saint on the opposite side—San Sisto (Pope Sixtus II), who reigned for only a year and then suffered martyrdom in the cemetery of Calixtus, A.D. 258. It was after him that the Church of the Black Monks at Piacenza was named, and he was their chief patron. Raphael has painted him in his ecclesiastical robe—an alba of white linen, a silk handkerchief, a cape of gold brocade lined with red. His whole attitude is beseeching. The left hand is placed across the breast and the right hand pointing out seems to say: 'Not for me, but for these poor souls that are in my charge.'

"The cherubs resting below and looking up are so well known that they need no description. They are the vanguard of the angels throng that served the painter by emphasizing the altar-top and connecting the heavenly visitors with the Church and its people.

"The whole picture is a pyramidal composition—the apex of the pyramid being the head of the Madonna, and the base being formed by the altar-top. The kneeling saints balance each other, and the figure of the Madonna acts somewhat like a keystone in holding them together. The relief of the figures is emphasized

ed by placing them against the great halo of light at the back and against the white clouds upon which they rest. The curtain at the top, the figures at the sides, and the altar below closes out the light somewhat, and centre attention on the Madonna and Child. And this is as the painter intended it should be.

"The Sistine Madonna was about the last of Raphael's great altar-pieces—for it was not long after the painting of it that the famous painter was seized with a violent fever, from the effects of which he died on Good Friday, 1520."

PAINTER OF THE ANGELUS.

The artistic side of our nature may not be very highly developed; we may be in blissful ignorance of the significance of lights and atmosphere; we may secretly believe that the "old masters" were overpraised and that they do not compare very favorably with the modern school; but we are interested in the artist, to whichever of the many schools he may belong, because though artist he is human too, and his life with its ups and downs has the fascination of the human for us.

The biography of Millet embodies all those elements that appeal to the interest. His struggles, his poverty, his ambitions, are common in their essence, if different in their manifestations; his sweetness, gentleness and purity of mind are examples worthy of imitation.

In 1811, a young Norman peasant, in order to escape separation from his betrothed by conscription, married her. The man was Jean Louis Millet, and the second child born of this union was Jean Francois Millet. "Jean" he was named for his father, "Francois" for the gentle saint Francois of Assisi, on whose feast day, October the fourth, he came into the world.

Much of the credit of his artistic nature and inspiration must be given to his people, and he himself gave it. The culture of the mother, the natural refinement and poetic nature of the father, and the loving training of a devout grandmother who is described as possessing a stern code with a dainty fancy. They were all poor, but not miserably poor. The mother worked all day in the fields by her husband's side and the grandmother took care of the eight children. But they loved God and one another, and their eyes were opened to the beauties of the world about them.

As the boy grew he went into the fields also, but instead of giving his spare minutes to rest he spent them in drawing, using scraps of paper and portions of the whitewashed wall. When he was eighteen his skill was so great that the family decided he should be sent to Cherbourg to study art. Here he made great advancement but at the end of the year his father died and Francois went back to the fields. But the call of his chosen work was too strong and he could not but heed. The town of Cherbourg had made him a small grant to study in Paris and urged by his grandmother he set out for the great city where he lived a life in which two strong forces drew against one another in his heart, love and longing for home and love of his art.

In 1840 his first picture was accepted by the Salon, and feeling satisfied by its acceptance that the root of the matter was in him he returned to Cherbourg. He fell in love with a pretty dressmaker whose portrait he had painted, married her and the two returned to Paris. She was a delicate little woman, and after two years of poverty she died, and the bereaved young husband went back to his old home for comfort in his grief.

He married again—Catherine Le-maire, of whom it is said, "she had a heart of gold and a courage beyond her years and she gladly devoted her whole life to the man she loved." And courage she needed, for during the thirty years of life together there were hardships that only love and courage could render endurable. To make money to keep them alive Millet began to paint pastels and small paintings in a popular Parisian style, and won by the skill which he put into his work the title "The Master of the Nude." But one day he overheard one young man say to another as they looked at his work, "A man named Millet did that. He never paints anything but these women." As unjust as the criticism was, there was enough truth in it to sting, and Millet resolved never to leave himself open again to such criticism, even though carrying out the resolve meant increased privation and self-denial.

After painting "The Haymakers"

for the government, he moved to the country where he could obtain models suitable for his work, in spite of the attempts of his fellow-artists to dissuade him. The first result of the change was the production of his great canvas "The Sower," in 1850. Of this his friend Senzier writes: "We know what a serious affair the sowing is to an agricultural people. When a man puts on the white grain-bag, rolls it around his left arm, fills it with seed the hope of the coming year, that man exercises a sort of sacred ministry. The importance of the deed is real, and he feels his responsibility. I have seen sowers who before they set foot upon the field would toss a handful of grain into the air in the sign of the cross, then stepping into the fields, they would pronounce in a low voice words which sounded like a prayer."

The following year the beloved grandmother died suddenly before he had an opportunity of seeing her, and two years later the hard-worked mother found rest in the grave. Offers for his pictures were few—they did not please the popular taste which preferred historical subjects and portraits of beauties. When sold, the prices obtained were so small that the artist had the terror of debt added to his other sorrows, yet, in this troublous time, he painted the two most beautiful pictures of his life, "The Gleaners" and "The Angelus." For both he obtained a few hundred francs, the first of which brought three hundred thousand francs when bought for the Louvre in 1889, and in the same year "The Angelus" changed possessors at a price of eight hundred thousand francs.

In 1863 the severest criticism was heaped upon him when "The Man with the Hoe" appeared upon the walls of the Salon. They said that in it he denied the charms of the country—that the stolid animal face of the man was a libel. This picture which inspired Edwin Markham's famous poem, found its way to America and was destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake disaster.

From that time a fuller measure of prosperity came to reward his toil, but his last years were lonely and spent in ill-health. At the age of sixty, on the morning of January 20th, 1875, he died, and was laid by the side of his friend Rousseau in the quiet cemetery of Chailly.

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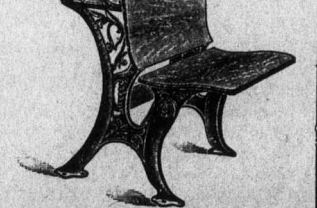
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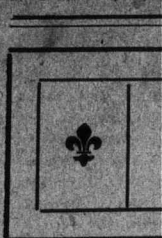
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She was in a strange going home, when news called out: "diago! Fighting line stared her—made this morning meeting—was talking about her son, had just left for near the city. He foreboded all sorts of him; it looked like he got his feet down sleep on the day what camp did you band was in?" "I'm young with, suddenly demands of politeness the front." "At the front?" "perplexed." "Do mauge?" "No." Rose's lip ly, but her brown and her voice even tiago—he's in the. The other woman the sudden recoil. "You don't m now!" The soldier's wife white smile: "Yes." "Heavens above!" woman. Her re- strang forward wi she looked at the fr her. "My dear ch handkerchief went with one hand while capaciously over t of the new friend, ductor or passenger you worry a mite," a husky and broke coming out all rig worry one mite. "B and is out in San nounced to the ca fighting this minute to come out all rig it!"

Rosa went her sol- her suburban home held high. She ha a woman might feel her dearest was a danger of death. learning. It was a were wounded—bleed heart, yet with a st that held her up in Her husband was s he would dominate ing was he, so tall —how might he escu It was horribly he up the shaded street newcomer in the nel the people she met "soldier's wife," and curiously. A group leaving one of the passed, and she coul were whispering: "I in the battle now. she feels."

A lady from across pusively ran down outstretched hand. "I can't let you p kell," she said, "with you. We-we all kn tain's in the battle, her handkerchief wen Ford's had done—"w going to come out a Askell."

"Thank you," said with that smile of h ed to show more pla her face was. Her l light that it was qu smile. She smiled v children, a boy and a to meet her, with lit hands, talking eager battle. She walked i child on either side, shadow that fell acro the shadow of the br hung out there the d house.

She smiled also wh the friends who rallie farther places. "Only had known sorrow, v was dead. Did her fac mid her head for a mo shoulder of the one v long shinken; but aft smiled as before at th ed her so anxiously. her, one and all: "H out all right!" to hea "Oh, yes, I know he v

But while they reas- whispered fears amo If he were killed—o wounded—how would news—who would tell