

16 STORIES OF THE FRENCH ARTISTS

career of Fouquet, as far as we know it, was his chief patron.

Fouquet came at an early age under the influence of the great Bruges masters, and upon the naturalistic side of their art he moulded his own style. Although the Italian renaissance was making itself felt throughout Europe, he does not seem to have been influenced by it in the least; in style and conception he can be claimed as one of the first of the purely French artists of whom we have any knowledge. Quite early in his career he attracted the attention of Charles VII, whose portrait he painted in 1444. The following year he was invited to Rome by the pope, Eugenius IV, to paint his portrait; the intense artistic activity he found around him in Italy did not, however, induce him to stay there for long. Possibly he found competition severe, and as a foreigner did not get the encouragement he had anticipated; but, whatever the cause may have been, within a few years he was back again in France. It was probably about 1452 that his connection with Stephen Chevalier began. The most important work Fouquet left us was the celebrated diptych of Melun, which was preserved in that city until 1775, when the shutters were separated.