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THE PAINTBOX

BY
MARTIN ARMSTRONG

WITH TEN ILLUSTRATIONS IN PHOTOGRAPHURE

THE HOW-&-WHY SERIES
EDITED BY
GERALD BULLETT

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THE PAINTBOX

CHAPTER I

WHAT PICTURES ARE

WHAT is the good of pictures? It cannot be said that they are of the slightest use. A wall holds up a roof and keeps out the wind and rain just as well whether it has a picture hanging on it or not. In this a picture is different from a carpet. A carpet is useful: it makes the floor warmer to the feet than bare boards and it also deadens the sound of footsteps. But a carpet is not only useful, and in fact when we buy a new carpet for the drawingroom we take its usefulness for granted. We do not say to the shopman: 'I want to see some carpets for winter wear, please,' nor 'I want a carpet that will prevent my hearing callers being shown into the drawingroom.' What we look out for is a carpet of pleasant pattern and colour, a colour perhaps that will go well with the drawingroom curtains. In fact, we want the carpet to be beautiful. In the East, where the most beautiful carpets in the world are made, people often hang one on the wall. There it ceases to be of any use whatever: it is hung there simply for decoration—in other words, because it is beautiful. But that, surely, is the reason why we hang a picture on the wall.

What is the difference, then, between a carpet hung on the wall and a picture? Simply that a carpet is made of wool or silk and a picture is painted. Is that the only difference?

Perhaps you will reply: 'No. I think that between most carpets and most pictures there is another difference, which is that the carpets are simply pleasant designs, pleasant patterns, and that's all. They don't *mean* anything. Whereas pictures *do* mean something. In other words, anyone looking at a picture could say what it is a picture *of*.'

You may say that, and you will be right as a general thing, because we *can* say of many pictures: 'This is a picture of the Virgin with the child Jesus on her knee,' or 'This is a picture of a wide plain with a town in the middle of it and mountains at the back of it,' or 'This is a picture of my grandmother.' But you can't say that a carpet is a carpet *of* anything.

Now all this is quite true of most of the pictures in the world, but I don't think you would be right to insist that a picture must necessarily be a picture *of* something. That, I think, would be to take too narrow a view of what a picture may be. I cannot see why a picture should not be just a beautiful pattern painted in beautiful colours, and nothing else at all; just like a carpet. If you like, you may paint things that you see around you, but if you prefer, you may simply paint patterns that come into your head, and in either case I think you have a perfect right to call the result a picture. And, as a matter of fact, there are artists nowadays who

paint pictures that don't represent anything at all, and some of them are very beautiful pictures. You will see a photograph of one facing page 92.

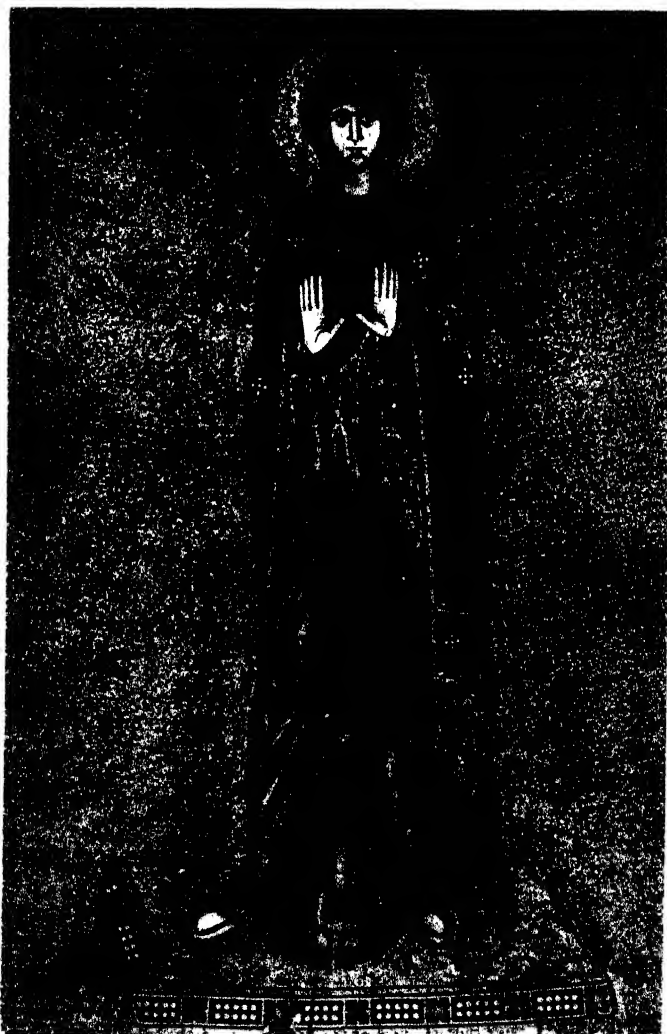
But the thing to remember about all pictures, no matter of what kind, is this—that, whatever they represent, they must have a nice pattern and nice colour. If you are going to paint a picture of three people sitting at a table, or of a barn under high elm-trees, you must arrange that your people and table, or your barn and elm-trees, make a nice pattern on the square of paper or canvas on which you are painting, and you must also arrange that the whole effect of your colours is beautiful. When you come to think of it, people who are any good at all at taking photographs do the same sort of thing. They don't just fire off the camera at anything: they look out for what they call 'a good point of view.' They look through the lens or into the view-finder and they move the camera about until they think they have got, say, the barn in just the right position as regards the tree on its left and have arranged that the gable of the farm shows above the roof of the barn on the right, and if they think that the farm gate looks rather bare they ask you or me to go and lean against it.

But, of course, for the most part, the photographer has to put up with what he finds. He can't dig up an elm-tree and plant it a few yards nearer the barn, or pull down the farm and build it up differently because it would make a nicer picture that way. But the painter is luckier: he can do what he likes. If there are things in the view he is painting that he doesn't like, he can

simply leave them out, and if there are bare spaces that want filling in he can fill them in with trees out of his head or put in a cattle-trough that isn't really there. It doesn't matter to him in the least so long as he makes a picture after his own heart.

The painter is free in more ways than this. Some people think it is the painter's duty to make the things in his pictures as like as possible to what they really are. That is great nonsense. It is like saying that the writer of fairy-tales must never describe palaces built upside down, or houses made of sugar, or fairies no bigger than a thimble, or moonlight-coloured horses, or magicians with eyes in the back of their heads, because such things do not really exist. The painter may paint exactly what he feels inclined to paint, so long as the result is beautiful. He is free to paint things not as they are but as he would like them to be. If he wishes to paint a pink horse and a pale blue forest he is free to do so, and if foolish people say to him: 'But there isn't such a thing as a pink horse,' the painter will reply: 'And that is exactly why I have painted one. A pink horse has been a long-felt want.' Or else he may reply: 'It is true that there *wasn't* such a thing as a pink horse, but there is now, because I've just gone and put one into this picture.'

Some of the greatest painters that ever lived were Chinese. In the British Museum there is a marvellous picture, by a Chinese painter, of a tiger. The foolish people who say that things in pictures ought to be exactly like what they are in life would point out that this tiger is not really like a tiger.



MADONNA

Mosaic, Murano Cathedral

Its eyes are far too big and far too turned up at the corners, its body is far too velvety and lithe, its paws are far too round and woolly. But the truth about that tiger is that it is much more like a tiger than any real tiger is. It is a sort of terrible fairy-tale tiger, much more secret and sly and wicked and cruel than any tiger in the jungle or the Zoo. When the Chinese painter sat down to paint it, he did not say to himself: 'I am going to paint a tiger and I must remember to make him look sly and cruel.' What he said was: 'I am going to paint slyness and cruelty and the best way to do that is to make them look something like a tiger.'

When the old Byzantines wished to make a picture of the Virgin Mary high up in the curve of the vault above the altar of a church near Venice, they did not try to make the figure of an ordinary woman. What they wanted to do was to make a figure solemn and awe-inspiring and unearthly, a figure like a goddess that would seem to tower above everybody and everything in the church, and a figure that would be a beautiful decoration in gold and colours for the vault. And so they made a figure much taller and much thinner than any woman could possibly be, as you can see for yourself in the photograph of it on the opposite page. It would be absurd for anyone to object that this figure is not like an ordinary woman: it was never intended to be so.

So, you see, things in art need not be like things in life. They may be, if the painter wishes them to be; but they need not be, if, for some good reason,

he wishes to make them different. And we shall see, when we look into the various periods of painting, that in some the artist did not try to make the things in his pictures look like the things we see in the world about us, while in others he was particularly careful to do so.

In the other chapters of this book I am going to tell you of various painters and groups of painters who have been working at various times during the last six or seven hundred years, and we shall see that at one time they were all trying to do one thing, and at another, another; and this not only as regards *what* they painted, but also *how* they painted it. Of course, in a small book such as this, I cannot tell you about all the painters and all the different groups of painters who lived and worked during that long time. If I were to try to do that, this book would have to be an enormously fat one. So I shall take a few, here and there, and if I leave out many whom you think I ought to have put in, you mustn't think it is because I don't think them worth putting in. But before I begin to tell you about the painters themselves, we must get our minds clear about one or two other things.

We have already answered the question 'What is the good of pictures?' But there is something else we must ask ourselves, and that is: 'Why do people paint pictures?'

Probably you have painted pictures yourself, or, if not painted them, at least drawn them in pencil or coloured chalks. Now if someone were to ask you, while you were making a picture, why you were doing so and what sort of feelings drove you

to do so, you would probably reply, if you thought a little before replying, that you wanted to play with shapes and colours and to make out of them something beautiful to look at, and that when you thought about it you felt a sort of excitement growing up inside you that forced you to get out your paintbox or your chinks and set about the job. Well, that is exactly what all painters do. They get an idea in their minds of beautiful shapes and colours, and they get so excited about it that at last they have to get out their paints and start painting it.

And so, when we look at a picture, we must not just stare at it as if it were a photograph of something, but we must bear in mind that the painter is showing us a thing invented by himself, something which seemed to him very beautiful and very exciting, and we must try to get out of it the pleasure and excitement which he put into it. If we forget to do that, we shall not get the full enjoyment out of a picture.

So much for why the painter paints. But there is another thing I must try to explain, so that when I mention it from time to time later on, as I shall have to do, you will have a clear idea of what I mean. It is the matter of *dimension*. The world that we see around us is a world of three dimensions, and the names of the three dimensions are Height, Width, and Depth; or, as they are sometimes called, Length, Breadth, and Thickness. I shall use the first three names, because in speaking of pictures they are clearer than the others. The only one of these three names that needs any explaining

is Depth. A picture, if we look upon it merely as a painted surface, has not really any depth. It has only Height and Width. You can take a tape-measure and measure the picture from the top to the bottom and that is the Height, and you can measure it from the left edge to the right edge and that is the Width; but though you can see right into the picture, so that you notice, say, hills far away in its distance, you can't measure this distance (which I call Depth) with your tape-measure because it is not real: it is only the painter's cleverness which makes you forget that the picture is really quite flat. But just as a Persian carpet hung on the wall has no depth, is simply a flat pattern which you see from top to bottom and from right to left but which you don't see *into* because it has no distance, no Depth, so a painter can paint a picture which has no Depth, and many of the old painters did so. For instance, that mosaic figure of the Virgin in the church near Venice, of which I told you, has no Depth. It is a flat figure: you don't feel, when you look at it, that you could put your arms round it. And there are pictures of saints painted long ago by Italians which have no Depth. The saints seem to be cut out of paper and stuck on to a golden surface. These pictures are beautiful flat patterns like a carpet: they have Height and Width, but no Depth. They are two-dimensional pictures, whereas pictures you can see into, pictures which have a distance in them, are three-dimensional pictures.

Let me put it in another way, so that there shall be no mistake about getting it quite clear. A rose

is a three-dimensional object: you can see into it. But if you press the rose in a book, it loses its depth and becomes flat. You can't see *into* it now, you can only see it. In fact, by pressing it you have turned it from a three-dimensional into a two-dimensional object.

It is, of course, much easier to paint a two-dimensional picture. You will have found out for yourself that it needs some skill, some knowledge of the tricks of the trade, to make anything you draw look as if it were solid and to make some things in your picture look near and others far away. We shall see soon how the old painters gradually found out how to do this.

I hope I have now made clear to you what I mean when I speak, as I shall often do, of two-dimensional and three-dimensional pictures.

Having settled these things I can now begin to tell you of painters and their pictures.

CHAPTER II

THE FLORENTINES

I HAVE mentioned twice already the mosaic figure of the Virgin in the church near Venice. That figure is in the Byzantine style, a style which began in Byzantium (nowadays called Constantinople) and which produced a great deal of rich and beautiful work in gold, enamel, mosaic, sculpture, and painting. Paintings in this style are almost entirely two-dimensional. The artists did not try to paint real people. What they painted were solemn shapes of Christ and the Virgin and saints, or sometimes Emperors and Empresses, arranged in beautiful patterns. This was the kind of painting that was being done in the town of Florence in Italy before the year A.D. 1300.

But about this time a change came into people's minds and they began to feel that Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary and the saints were not, after all, such grim, awe-inspiring persons as had been believed; that they were more like perfect human beings. When people thought, now, of the Virgin and the child Jesus, the solemn idea of the Queen of Heaven with the Son of God on her knee had changed into the more gentle idea of a mother with her baby.

Now you will understand that when men wanted to paint decorations for church walls and the solemn shapes of unearthly beings, the two-dimensional kind of painting suited their purpose very well. But when they began to think of painting real people, such as a mother and her baby, then they had to try to make them look alive and solid and three-dimensional. In fact they had to paint not a dry, pressed rose, but a rose that was alive and blooming.

The first painter to do this in Florence was Giotto, who was born in 1276, which, if you like to work it out, you will find is over six hundred and fifty years ago. When you look at Giotto's paintings you will at once see that they are full of real, solid people. Perhaps you know that you can make any shape look more solid by shading it on one side so that it seems to stand out of the paper. But there are other ways of making things look solid, and though Giotto did use shading of a simple kind to make his figures stand out, he did it most of all by his marvellous drawing. He was such a wonderful fellow with a pencil that by the very lines he drew he could make you feel that the thing he was drawing was not just a flat shape, but a solid body. This extraordinary gift for drawing enabled him to put real people into his paintings and to turn his back on the dry, flat, immovable old saints in solemn attitudes which the artists had painted till then. And so he set about painting a great number of pictures of stories out of the Bible or stories about the lives and adventures of saints such as Saint Francis of Assisi. All the

people in these pictures seem to be real: you feel that they can move about, talk, lift things up, and behave as living people do.

This new way of painting, started by Giotto, was carried on by other great painters. Not that the old fashion died out completely. Other painters still painted saints on gold backgrounds. But even the old fashion became more human: the saints were no longer so grim and dry and flat as they used to be. They became prettier, more like the people of a fairy-tale, and though not yet perfectly solid, still very much more so than they used to be. But though many beautiful pictures in this older and more solemn style were still painted, the chief thing the Florentine painters who followed Giotto did was to paint real, solid human beings.

Now you will soon see, if you think about it, that when a painter becomes excited about painting human beings he is not content to paint them standing still. If he is determined to show how alive and real they are, he must show them using their arms and legs and muscles, moving about, wrestling, riding horses, or shooting bows and arrows. But clothes hide the arms and legs and cover up the muscles of the human body, so if you want to paint people with strong muscles and round arms and legs, doing all these vigorous things, you will find it better to paint them without clothes, or at least with very few clothes. Just look at the picture at page 21 of Hercules killing the Hydra. You can see not only how strong Hercules is but also how quickly and strongly he is moving. You feel that he is certainly going to catch the Hydra

a tremendous crack with that great club which he is brandishing in his right hand.

Pictures like this are what the Florentine painters did better than any other painters of their time. I do not mean to say that they painted nothing but naked figures: most of their pictures, in fact, are pictures of people in clothes: but some of their greatest pictures are of naked or nearly naked people, and the greatest of all Italian painters, Michelangelo, who was also one of the greatest artists that have ever been, painted hardly anything but naked figures. But even the artists who put their figures into clothes or armour, drew them and painted them in such a way that we feel there are solid bodies and limbs inside the clothes or armour.

If you will turn back now to the Byzantine figure of the Virgin and then look at the picture by Verocchio at page 28 of the Virgin adoring the infant Christ, you will at once see for yourself what a wonderful change had come over Italian painting. The people in Verocchio's picture are real people. You can almost imagine that they might get up and step out of the frame. Look at their faces: they are the faces of living people. If you met them in the street you might easily recognize them. But the face of the Virgin in the church near Venice is not the face of a real person. If you passed that face in the street you would not feel that you had seen it before: it is just anybody's face; or rather, nobody's face, because it is not a real face at all. But Verocchio was not born till ninety-nine years after Giotto died and a very much longer time after

the making of the Madonna mosaic in the church near Venice.

Giotto was such a great painter that no one succeeded in doing as well as he had done for a great many years. Then, at last, other great painters arose. They had learned much from Giotto's work and also from that of a great Florentine sculptor called Donatello, whose statues and sculptures in marble and bronze, besides Giotto's work, set them trying to make the figures they painted look as real and as round as possible.

The greatest painter after Giotto was a young man called Masaccio who was born in 1401 and died when he was only twenty-seven. He painted figures both clothed and naked, figures so grand that until the coming of Michelangelo, seventy-four years later, no one painted any to beat them. But there were several other fine painters in the meantime; for instance, Paolo Uccello, Andrea del Castagno, Antonio Pollaiuolo, Botticelli, all of them great in the Florentines' especial greatness, the painting of the human figure.

But in all the painters of these days we notice a peculiar thing, which is that, except when they painted a portrait, they always chose for the subjects of their pictures, not the things that they saw happening in the world about them, but scenes and stories out of the Bible, such as the Virgin and Child, or the Wise Men bringing gifts to the child Jesus, or the Transfiguration, or the Crucifixion; or scenes from the lives of the saints, such as Saint Francis preaching to the birds, or Saint George and the Dragon; or else scenes from old Greek



ANTONIO POLLAIUOLO. HERCULES AND THE HYDRA

Uffizi Gallery, Florence

or Latin tales such as *The Labours of Hercules*, *Venus rising from the sea*, *Apollo and Daphne*, and so on. The fact was that nobody thought of asking them to paint present-day scenes. What the churches and monasteries wanted was holy pictures, and what the great nobles and merchants wanted was scenes from Greek and Latin books in which they happened to be very interested at that time. But though the painters painted all these things for them obediently enough, they did not really shut their eyes to the gay, brightly coloured life which they saw all round them. Far from it. So when Botticelli was ordered to paint a picture of the Wise Men with all their followers visiting Joseph and Mary and the Baby in the Stable, he painted the followers in the gay dresses which he saw in the streets of Florence and even gave them the faces of some of the famous people of the town, and the Stable was much more like a bit of a palace in Florence than a stable in the Holy Land in the days of Jesus Christ. But it was not till long afterwards that painters gave up painting Bible scenes and lives of saints and stories of Greek and Latin gods and goddesses and began to paint the common things of everyday life, people drinking in an inn, a lady playing a piano, kitchen tables and pots and pans, or views of streets and the countryside. In the days of the Florentines these simple things were not the fashion.

You must not imagine, from what I have told you of the Florentine painters, that in their excitement about painting the human body, whether naked or clothed, they forgot about other things.

The older painters often painted their figures on a background of plain gold, but the Florentines showed them in palaces, churches, courtyards, or out in the country, and when you have got to know their work well it leaves in your mind a memory of crowds of gay people gorgeously dressed, full of life and movement, sitting or moving about in churches, courtyards or rooms or in front of beautiful buildings, or among trees or against a background of blue hills. But till this time painters had had very little practice in painting country views, and it was not till many years later that they began to paint the country for its own sake and not merely, as these Florentines did, as a background for their human figures. And so the background of country against which these figures are painted is often very strange, unreal-looking country. However, it serves the purpose for which it was intended, that is, to be no more than a pleasant background for their gay figures. Later in this book I shall have something to tell you about how the art of painting the countryside, or landscape painting as we call it, gradually grew from its first beginnings in Florentine backgrounds to the wonderful landscapes of modern times. But at present we are occupied with the old Italians and the painting of the human body.

There are so many fine Florentine painters that I can't possibly tell you about them all. There is Botticelli, for instance, who painted some of the most enchanting pictures that have ever been painted, and the great Leonardo da Vinci, who was not only a magnificent painter, but also a

sculptor, an architect, a musician, and a great fellow in everything he did, and he did an extraordinary variety of things. But there is one last Florentine artist, the greatest of all, whom I must tell you something about. His name is Michelangelo. Like Leonardo, he was not only a painter, but also a very great sculptor and a great architect.

You will remember what it was that the Florentine painters were for ever trying to do in their paintings—to express the strength and beauty and roundness and movement of the human body; and you will remember, too, that I explained that this could be best done by painting naked bodies, so that limbs and muscles could be clearly seen instead of being muffled up in clothes. Well, the man who did this best of all, who possessed the powers of all the painters who had gone before him and a greater power that was his own, was Michelangelo. Never before or since has the human body been painted so magnificently as it was painted by him. And he was a marvellous sculptor too. There are four unfinished marble figures of his in Florence. They were to be figures of naked captives bound with ropes and trying to get free, and when you look at them you feel, not so much that the sculptor has begun to carve the great blocks of white marble into the shapes of naked giants, but that you are actually watching naked giants struggling rather wearily to push themselves free of the marble that surrounds them and holds them prisoner.

Michelangelo's figures, whether carved or painted, are larger, stronger, and more beautiful

than real human bodies: they are men become gods. And yet, in spite of their beautiful, powerful bodies, they have a look of sadness, as if they were saying to Michelangelo: 'Here we are. You have made us, but what have you got for us to do?' And it seems as if, having at last done so marvelously what it had been trying to do for over one hundred and fifty years, there was nothing left for Florentine painting to do; for when Michelangelo died, the great times of Florentine painting died with him.

Many of the great galleries in Europe and America have fine collections of Florentine paintings. The collection in the National Gallery is one of the finest in the world. If you go to see them, you will be so delighted with the crowds of gay and delightful figures that you may at first forget that each picture is not simply a peep-show of times gone by but is also a picture in the true sense of the word; that is, a thing carefully and lovingly made by the artist out of beautiful shapes and colours, a work of art and not a mere coloured photograph. Look again at the one by Verocchio facing page 28 and you will see at once how beautiful and how complicated its pattern is. You may be sure that Verocchio tried not only to paint people who seemed to be real and alive, but also to fit them into a three-dimensional pattern that should be a delight to look at. You will also see, if ever you get a chance of looking at the original in the National Gallery, that he has taken care to make a beautiful harmony of colours of it.

Yet, as regards colour, we must confess that the

Florentines were so fond of gay colours that they did not always realize that it is not enough to cram your pictures full of them, but that you must also take care that all these colours make a beautiful and harmonious effect as a whole. They were so excited about colouring the various parts that they often left the whole out of account. You yourself have probably discovered that if you have got a beautiful new box of paints it is very difficult to prevent yourself from putting all the brightest colours into one picture, just for the pleasure of laying them on, instead of pausing to consider which goes well with which and trying to keep yourself in check so as to make something fine and rich and harmonious rather than dazzling and gaudy. There was another school of painters, the Venetians, who were better at this than the Florentines, as I shall tell you later on.

CHAPTER III

OTHER ITALIANS

I HAVE said so much about the Florentines that I may have led you to suppose that they were the only painters in the Italy of those days. But that was very far from being the case. All over Italy, in Umbria (which is a great piece of country between Florence and Rome), in Padua and Ferrara and Milan and Venice and various other towns in the north, painters were painting for all they were worth. It was as if, in the Italy of those days, people had caught painting as they might have caught measles. They were as excited about pictures—both those who painted and those who looked on or bought—as we are nowadays about motor cars and aeroplanes. Every church, every palace, every diningroom (or refectory as it is called) in monastery or convent, had its pictures, and these were not only framed and hung on the walls, but actually painted straight on to the walls by a process called fresco. Some of the churches, which you may yourself see if ever you travel in Italy, have the whole of their walls covered with brightly coloured paintings: not a bare patch anywhere. And the same with rooms in some of the

palaces. Even the ceilings often have paintings on them.

In the town of Siena, which is not very far from Florence, there lived in the days before Giotto a painter called Duccio who painted in the Byzantine style. He had a pupil called Simone Martini, a fellow eight or nine years younger than Giotto. But this Martini did not paint in the Byzantine style like his master. Perhaps he had ridden over to Florence and seen the wonderful new kind of painting that Giotto was doing there. Anyhow his paintings are a delightful mixture of the old and the new. Perhaps you have heard how certain kinds of wine, such as Sherry, are made by blending some of the very old with some of the new. The result is that the old gives a richness and flavour to the new, and the new gives life and strength to the old. Something of that kind happened to the art of Simone Martini. You can see in it all the rich two-dimensional pattern-making of the Byzantines, but his figures are not stiff and dry: life and movement have come into them from the new art of Florence.

But, compared with Florence, Siena was a small, remote town. Surrounded by its great walls and towers, it kept very much to itself, as all towns did in those days when there were no railways and very few roads. It was probably much more of an adventure for a citizen of Siena to ride on a visit to Florence or Rome than it is for us to go to France or Belgium. And so you can understand that though the painters of Siena did see something of the work of those greater painters in Florence, and did learn something from them, they

still kept their own little old-fashioned Sienese style. To paint as well as the Florentines you had to live and study in Florence. There was all the difference, for painters in those days, between living in Florence and living in Siena, that there is for you nowadays, if you want to learn to talk French, between going to live in France and having a French lesson twice a week in the schoolroom at home.

For this reason the Sienese painters always lagged behind. But in their own small way they painted a lot of delightful pictures in which Virgins and Babies and saints and angels seem to be more like fairies and elves and gnomes and wizards in a golden fairyland. As time passed, little by little they gave up the old Byzantine ways and tried to be completely new-fashioned, which was a great pity, because the new style was not natural to them. They could not compete with the great Florentines: their charm lay in the mixing of old and new, and so when they threw over the old their charm went with it. What they were interested in was charming scenes and charming patterns: they were not great enough to study and toil at the painting of the human body in all its roundness and strength and vigorous movement until they could make of it pictures more wonderful than had ever been made before. They lived too little in the life around them; too much in dreams and fairy-tales.

But this was not so everywhere. In other towns in Italy great painters arose who were as excited as the Florentines were about the study of the

human body. One of them, called Piero della Francesca, had learned much from Masaccio and the sculptor Donatello and other great Florentines. The figures in his pictures are as firm and solid as statues. They stand solemnly in their places and we feel, as we look at them, that their weight is actually pressing on the ground on which their feet are so firmly planted. Their faces too are firm and fixed: they have none of the feelings, the joys and sorrows, it seems, that we ordinary mortals have. They are solid, awe-inspiring, but perfectly alive and real, and the country against which they are painted is as bare and solid as they are. There are two very fine pictures by him in the National Gallery which you ought to go and see if you get the chance. He taught painting to two other great painters of whom the more famous was called Signorelli.

Signorelli, besides being taught by Piero della Francesca, learnt a great deal from the paintings of Antonio Pollaiuolo, one of which you saw at page 21. Pollaiuolo, as you will remember, was a very great painter of the naked human body: he loved to paint strong men, such as Hercules, not standing still as Piero della Francesca's people usually are, but in strong, violent attitudes, as in the picture of Hercules and the Hydra. Signorelli loved to do the same. He painted a huge fresco of the Day of Judgment in the cathedral of a town called Orvieto in which you see naked bodies rising out of the ground at the sound of the last trump, and you can see how violently they are struggling to thrust their way out of the solid earth. Some are

still buried up to their middles and are pressing their hands against the ground with all their might to haul their legs out of the earth. The figures are so real that they make you feel that you yourself are pulling and tugging and struggling just as they are.

Meanwhile, up in the north of Italy, at Padua which is somewhere near Venice, a man called Squarcione was teaching painting. He too had learned from the great Florentine sculptor Donatello. And not only that; he had also made a careful study of old Roman sculpture. Now statues are nearly always of human beings and very often of naked human beings, and being statues they are, of course, solid; so it is easy to see how a painter who studied statues became keen on the human body and on making it look as solid and real as possible in his pictures. This is what Squarcione taught his pupils to do. He had two very famous pupils, Mantegna and Cosimo Tura, both about the same age.

But before I tell you about Mantegna and Tura I want to say something about this business of painters learning from other painters or from sculptors, as so many painters did at this time from the work of great painters like Giotto, Masaccio, Uccello and Pollaiuolo and from the great sculptor Donatello. You must not forget that to paint a real picture you must do something that is quite your own, not a thing copied from somebody else's work. You may watch a great painter or sculptor at work, as the pupils of Squarcione probably watched Donatello at work when he was in Padua (for Donatello spent about ten years there), or you

can look at his work when it is finished and get hints from it and become so excited by it that you feel you must go and try to do something of your own as good as his. In this way you have simply learned from him and been inspired by his example to do your own work better. But the point is that you *do* do your own work: you don't copy his idea of, say, a human body. You paint a human body out of your own knowledge and study of human bodies, and so you paint a picture of your own, a work of art; not a copy of someone else's, for that would not be a work of art, however well you did it, but merely a copy of a work of art. There is all the difference, you see, between learning to do a thing for yourself and copying what other people have done: between seeing something for yourself and being told by somebody else what he has seen.

Now the trouble with Mantegna, the most famous of Squarcione's pupils, was that as he grew older he became more interested in Roman sculpture than he was in living human bodies: he was more interested in what the Romans had seen than in what he had seen for himself. The worst of that was that even the Romans themselves were not very good sculptors: *they* were more interested in what the Greeks had seen than in what they had seen for themselves. So you see that Mantegna, at his worst, got his ideas of the human body not at first hand, nor even at second hand from the Romans, but at third hand from the Greeks through the Romans. Is it any wonder that by the time the human body got into one of Mantegna's later pictures it had become rather hard and lifeless?

That was a great pity, because Mantegna was a very fine painter, and his best pictures, in which he has relied on what he himself had learned at first hand about the human body, are extremely good. He had a way of painting figures as if they were raised on a platform above the level of your eyes, so that they seem to tower into the air and look very solid and majestic. But you do feel that many of them are rather lifeless, rather unexciting.

In the Orangery at Hampton Court Palace you can see a set of huge paintings of his, pictures of a great procession, which, though not his best work, are very fine. But if you look at them attentively you will not fail to notice something rather strange about that great procession. You will see, in fact, that in spite of prancing horses and tramping feet, no man and no animal in that procession is really moving. The trumpeters have great trumpets raised to their lips and their cheeks are puffed out, but you can't feel that they are really blowing great blasts of music. Everything is frozen into stoniness. It is a painting not of a real procession which Mantegna had seen or imagined for himself, but of a procession carved in stone. He has left the Romans to imagine it for him.

That is what comes of not using your own eyes and your own imagination. If Mantegna had done so he might have been one of the greatest of painters.

Cosimo Tura, Mantegna's fellow pupil in Padua, was a very different sort of person. He doesn't seem to have cared two straws about the Romans and their sculpture. What he cared for was what

he saw in the world about him, not what other people had seen. There was nothing two-dimensional about Tura. He was determined that everything in his pictures should be as solid and round and real as he could make it, and not only solid but as hard as flint. There was to be nothing soft and flabby and doubtful. Even the cloth of cloaks and robes became in his pictures as hard and solid as cast iron. When he paints a bunch of grapes they are grapes of polished steel. When he puts a background of country into a picture, it is bare, hard, rocky country: you feel that he couldn't be bothered with things as soft as flowers and leaves.

Tura was just as keen as the Florentines on painting the naked body, and you may think, from what I have said of him, that all his figures would be as stony and lifeless as Mantegna's. Nothing of the kind. They are all as alive as can be. Many of them, especially the naked ones, are strange, knobbly people with claw-like hands and feet, and swollen rheumatic joints: but you never for a moment feel that they are not very much alive. They are alive, in their strange, grim way, in every toe and finger, every muscle of their arms, every gnarled knee-joint, for when Tura painted them his mind was full of real human bodies, not of Roman sculpture. There is a magnificent picture of his—the finest of all, I think—in the National Gallery, of the Virgin and Child and Angels, in which we see not only what a wonderful painter he was in the ways I have mentioned, but also what a magnificent pattern-maker and colourist he could be.

Meanwhile other painters were busy in the

south, in Umbria. Umbria is a country of quiet open spaces. The blue plain stretches for miles and miles into long lines of blue hills, hills not jagged and fierce as leaping flames like the hills in southern Spain, but quiet and slow-curving like whales sleeping in a calm sea. On some of the hills are little grey towns with their walls and towers, and there are towns dotted about upon the plains also. The air is very clear, and the sky, there, seems calmer and softer and deeper than in other lands. This feeling of calmness, openness, and quiet beauty must have got into the very bones of the people who lived there, for we find it in all the pictures of the Umbrian artists. When you look at Perugino's pictures you feel that you might walk into them, past the figures of saints or Virgins who stand or sit in front, into the quiet, airy, beautifully arranged country behind them. That means, doesn't it, that Perugino's pictures are three-dimensional, that he was good not only at making of his pictures a pattern like the pattern on a carpet, but a pattern that reached inwards—a solid pattern—as well. It is this quiet spaciousness that is the best part of Perugino's pictures. His figures are often very beautiful and always very quiet and a little sad, but you do not feel, as you do in the pictures of the great Florentines, that they are absolutely real. They do not stand solidly on their feet. He was more interested, it seems, in his background than in his human figures.

Perugino is an example of another danger that lies in wait for the artist. I told you how Mantegna spoilt himself by caring more about what the

Romans saw than what he saw himself, in fact, by cribbing from the Romans. Well, as time went on, Perugino began to crib from himself, which is just as bad. The way it happened was this. People admired his painting so much that he began to get more and more orders for pictures, and at last he was getting so many that he couldn't keep pace with the demand, or rather, he could not have done so if he had painted each new picture as carefully and lovingly as he ought to have done. At first, when, for instance, he wanted to paint a figure of Saint Michael, he got some young man in the town to come and pose for him and so made his Saint Michael out of a real person; but later on, when all these orders came pouring in and people wanted other Saint Michaels, he didn't, as he ought to have done, paint him again from real life and make a new Saint Michael in different clothes, perhaps, and in a different position, but he just copied him from the one he had done before. Of course the copy was not nearly so good as the first figure, because it is boring to copy your own work, you can never get back the pleasure and excitement with which you first made the painting. In fact, even though the first figure was painted by you, you are not painting what you see, when you paint it over again, but merely what another person has seen—that other *you* who painted it in the first instance. And so Perugino got more and more slipshod over his figures, and even got other people to paint them for him, and instead of being a serious and patient artist, turned himself into nothing better than a picture-factory.

Something of the same sort happened to Raphael, who also came from Umbria. He was a greater painter than Perugino; in fact, as a designer he was one of the very greatest. Both the flat pattern and the three-dimensional design of his pictures are perfectly balanced: everything is just exactly where it ought to be so as to give us the most delightful feelings when we look at them. There is the same lovely feeling of open space as there is in Perugino's, and, besides this, Raphael had a marvellous imagination. He could think of an endless variety of beautiful people and beautiful scenes for every kind of picture. But he had not the great Florentines' power of creating magnificent human bodies. If it were not for the beautiful airy halls or landscapes in which they are standing his figures would not seem very wonderful to us. He too became so popular that he could not cope with all the orders that came flooding in, and, like Perugino, he began to work hurriedly and carelessly and hired a lot of assistants, though he did not go so far as Perugino in cribbing from himself.

Both Perugino and Raphael learned a great deal about painting from the work of the Florentines; in fact, as you must have noticed, all these other painters in other towns in Italy had, in one way or another, learned most of the best that they learned from the great school of Florence. If there was room in this book, I could tell you about many more of them in other Italian towns, but I want to tell you about the painters in Venice, the Venetians as they are called, who were the greatest of all Italian painters next to the Florentines.

CHAPTER IV

THE VENETIANS

ALTHOUGH great painting died in Florence with the death of Michelangelo, it was still very much alive in Venice. Fine pictures were being painted in Venice while the great Florentines were still at work, the finest of them by Giovanni Bellini. The chief difference between Florentine and Venetian painting was that the Venetians were less interested in the human body and its movements than the Florentines, but they were more interested in colour for its own sake. The Florentines used gay colours to decorate their human beings, but the Venetians used colour more carefully and soberly and were careful about the total effect. They liked to make their people look real, but they were content to make them healthy and dignified: they were not so anxious to show that their limbs and muscles were strong and full of movement. If Florentine and Venetian painters were to come to life and pay a visit to London today, I think we should meet all the Venetians watching the Lord Mayor's Show; but we should find the Florentines among the crowds at football matches and boxing championships.

But about the time of Michelangelo the Venetians began to do something new in painting, something which the Florentines had not done. They began to use colour not simply as if it were something gay with which to fill in the spaces between the lines of their drawing, but as if it were a stuff in itself, like clay or putty, out of which shape could be modelled. If you look at a picture by Tintoretto you don't feel that Tintoretto first made a drawing and then set about painting it (though as a matter of fact he did): you feel that he took a lot of different coloured oil paints and skilfully laid them on, painting one over another, letting one fade into another, in fact actually making his picture out of paint, instead of out of drawing and colouring and shading. And in these later Venetian pictures you feel not only that the figures themselves are made out of colour, but that they all stand or sit or move in a beautiful summery air, golden with sunshine or cool with the transparent shade of leaves. Every one looks well-fed, handsome, happy, and, generally, idle. And the country in which they are seen looks like real country, for the Venetians were discovering how to paint nature and to use it not just as a background for their people, but as a world in which their people could live and move.

Giorgione, a young pupil of the great Bellini, who died when he was young, was the first to paint in this new way. It seems, in Giorgione's pictures, that life has grown warm and rich and lazy as a ripe fruit. The days of Pollaiuolo's violent figures, of the struggling bodies of Signor-

elli's Last Judgment, of Michelangelo's sad and powerful giants, are over; and in their place we see calm, beautiful and dreamy young people playing on musical instruments or idling in warm green woodlands, with nothing to do but to enjoy the summer which had dawned for the first time in the world of painting. These, we feel, are the pictures that the rich aristocrats and merchants of Venice liked to hang in their palaces.

Giorgione's way of painting was carried on by Titian who was almost the same age as Giorgione and had been a pupil of Bellini's with him.

Such were the paintings of Giorgione, Titian, and Tintoretto. At the beginning of this book you see one of Titian's best pictures. It is a big picture really, but you can imagine, even though we have had to make this photograph quite small and leave the colours out, how full it is of warm, sunny air and green trees and blue distance. In Florentine pictures you would find it difficult to say whether the air was warm or cold, but this picture of Titian's seems to be bathed in summer.

Tintoretto went even further than this. He was a great painter of light and darkness. He painted human beings and the country, not simply as they are in themselves, but as they appear when strong lights and strong shadows fall on them. He was a great painter of the human body: he had studied the work of Michelangelo and he delighted not only in dignified and beautiful people, as the earlier Venetians did, but also, like the Florentines, in human muscles and limbs and power of movement.

Jacopo Bassano, who lived at the same time as

Tintoretto, brought another important change into painting. He and his sons began to put, not only lords and ladies or Virgins and saints or gods and goddesses into their paintings, but countryfolk and farmyard animals. In Bassano's pictures the painting of nature and the countryside is carried still further. Like Tintoretto, he was good at putting a feeling of light and air into his scenes. Just as in the pictures of the Florentines the human body became more and more real, so in those of the Venetians nature became more real and more important.

Tintoretto and Jacopo Bassano both died in 1592. Great things had been done in painting in Italy since Giotto first began to make his figures like real, three-dimensional beings instead of flat, decorative shapes; but there had been time for painters to make experiments and to learn new ways of painting, for between the date of Giotto's death and that of Tintoretto and Bassano two hundred and fifty-six years had passed by—as long as from the reign of Charles the Second to the present day.

So much for the Venetians and the other Italians. But before we leave Venice there is something interesting to be noticed about the city itself and the great painters who lived there. Venice, as you probably know, is an island city built on piles in a lagoon. There are very few streets in it: most of its streets are canals, so that instead of walking through the town you row through it in a gondola. And wherever you go you see churches and palaces reflected in the water, and the light of the sky

reflected in the water and reflected back on to church and palace walls. In the evening, at sunset, and in the early morning there are wonderful effects of light and shadow and coloured mists, so that to go about in Venice is sometimes like living in a beautiful dream of colours that are always changing and melting into each other.

If ever you go to Venice and see all this, it will very likely strike you as extraordinary that the great Venetian painters, living in the middle of these lovely sights, never thought of trying to paint them. For all the notice they took of them, they might as well have lived in Cannon Street Station. But the truth is that no one ever sees more than he wants to see. What the great Venetians wanted to see was the grand people of Venice, the fine processions and the fine buildings. It never occurred to them that a picture could be made out of such vague, dreamlike things as air and water and mist and reflections. When they did want to paint natural things they rowed over from Venice to the mainland where they could paint trees and blue hills and valleys and rocks, solid things that gave you a chance of studying them and drawing and painting them before they changed and faded as such dreamy things as reflections and mists do.

Many years had to pass and painters had to learn a great deal more about painting and about the strange things that light and shadows and water and mists can do, before they could awake to these things and think about turning them into pictures. And so it was not till well over a hundred years after the last great Venetians, Tintoretto and

Bassano, were dead and buried and great painters of other lands had already discovered much more about painting nature, that two painters arose in Venice called Canaletto and Guardi, who began to notice the beauty of Venice and its lagoon and to turn it into pictures.

CHAPTER V

FOUR OLD MASTERS

I SAID in Chapter III. that painting broke out in Italy like measles. Crowds of people caught it all over the country and it raged for over two hundred and fifty years. It was not till Tintoretto and Bassano died that it came to an end. But it had already broken out in other lands, in fact it had been raging years before in Flanders; and before Titian, Tintoretto, and Bassano died, a man from the island of Candia, in Greece, who was nicknamed El Greco, had gone to Venice and caught the painting-measles from the Venetians, and the same things happened a few years later (though by that time Tintoretto and the others were dead) to the Flemish painter Rubens who travelled in Italy and learned much from the great Italian way of painting. Twenty-two years after Rubens was born, when the painter El Greco had settled in Spain, a great Spanish painter was born called Velasquez, and, seven years after him, the great Dutchman Rembrandt.

But before I tell you about these four painters I must say something more about the different ways of painting pictures.

If you find a man sitting in a chair in a room or a garden and decide to sit down and make a picture of him in his surroundings, there are various ways in which you can do it. You can make a picture of what you saw the moment you went into the room or garden—that is, a single impression made up of a number of things, none of them very clear because you haven't had time, in the first glance, to look at each thing particularly. We will call this an A kind of picture.

Or you can paint a picture of what you see when you fix your eyes on the man in the chair—that is, of a clearly seen man and chair with light and shadows on them and a lot of rather vague things round about them, things which are vague because what you are looking at is not them but the man and the chair. This we will call a B kind of picture.

Or you can paint a picture of everything in the room or garden, man and chair included, after you have sat for a long time and looked at each thing separately and made a careful drawing of it. This kind of picture will not be a picture of the scene as you see it, for you cannot see everything clearly at once. As soon as you fix your attention on one thing the other things become vague: your eyes are too much occupied with the thing you are looking at to be able to see the other things as anything more than vague shapes. So your picture will not be a single view of a room or garden: it will be a picture of, say, twenty different views; first a view of a table perhaps, then a view of a fireplace, then a view of the man's face against the back of the chair, and so on. All these twenty views

you will have put together into one picture, but it will not be a picture of what you really see when you give one look at the whole room. Let us call this kind of picture the C kind. You may say, before you stop to think, that this is the most real kind of picture, but if you think a little, you will see that it is not, because it is not a single picture of what you can ever see in real life. It is a picture of what you have got to know about many different things at many different moments.

And you must remember, too, that we don't very often see even single things exactly as they are, because some things have bright lights shining on parts of them so that they dazzle us, and others are almost hidden in shadow so that we see only a little bit of them and guess the rest; and everything that is shiny reflects other things, so that a polished table has a reflection of a window in it at one place and a great mist of red, in another, reflected from a red curtain.

There is yet another kind of picture you might make of your man seated in a room or garden. You might say to yourself: 'I don't care about men and chairs and trees and desks and I don't want to paint them, but I do like their shapes and colours when I see them grouped together. So I shall paint the shapes and colours. I shall not mind if people say: "That shape isn't a man. It's more like a sack of potatoes." I shall simply reply: "It isn't a man or a sack of potatoes either. It's simply a plain solid shape—though as a matter of fact it was a man in a chair that gave me the idea of painting a shape like that.'" Now this kind of picture we will call

the D kind. It is a picture of shapes and colours, a three-dimensional pattern, and nothing more. It is not a picture *of* anything. In fact it is like a Persian carpet, except that its pattern is solid, or *in depth* as you might say, and not simply flat or two-dimensional like the carpet's.

Now after all that talk in the last chapter about the Florentines who tried so hard to paint human bodies as they saw them in the world about them, I hope you have not forgotten what I said at the beginning of this book—that no painter *need* make people or things like real people or things unless he wants to. The Florentines *did* want to, but the artist who made the figure of the Virgin in the church near Venice did *not* want to. And if you think that your picture of a room would look nicer if all the doors and windows were crooked, you may certainly make them so. Perhaps you have seen one of those round mirrors which reflect the whole room as if it were a little picture, but reflect it with all the lines of doors and windows and tables and chairs curving towards its centre. Well, that is a reflection of a room all right, but nothing in it is the same shape as it is in the room itself. The mirror, in reflecting the room, has changed the shape of everything in it, and if you like to behave as the mirror does, and change the shape of things when you paint them, well, why shouldn't you? So long as the result is something beautiful, it doesn't matter two straws.

Now let us settle which kind of picture—the A, B, C, or D kind—the Florentines painted. If you look at a Florentine painting you can have no doubt.

Everything in it is equally clear. There are no indistinct bits. Everything is drawn in clear lines and colours. It was the C kind they painted.

But when we get to the later Venetians (and the later Florentines too, for that matter), painters such as Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, and Bassano, we notice that all parts of their pictures are not equally clear. There are dark places, indistinct places, one colour melts into another, though the most important parts of their pictures, which are the chief people in them, are clear enough. They were beginning, you see, to paint the B kind of picture. And the four great painters, El Greco, Rubens, Velasquez, and Rembrandt, carried on this new way of painting very much further.

El Greco, though a Greek, lived in Spain most of his life. When he was a young man he went to Venice in the days of Titian, Tintoretto, and Bassano, and studied painting there. Yet, in spite of this, you would never for a moment mistake his pictures for those of a Venetian painter. You might expect to see Titian's and Tintoretto's people walking about in the real world; but you know, as soon as you look at them, that you would never see El Greco's anywhere except in his pictures; for though they look alive right enough, and though their faces are full of very strong feelings, they are alive in a strange, wild, unnatural way, and their bodies often seem to be pulled out to twice the length any human body could be. For El Greco, though he could paint real people when he wanted to, generally chose to paint people out of the strange, wild thoughts in his mind—people who

seem to whirl slowly or leap upwards like clouds or flames. He had learnt from Tintoretto how to put great lights and darkneses into his paintings, and many of his pictures seem to be full of thunderstorms, so that parts of his figures are brilliantly lighted as if by lightning and other parts hidden in darkness. You may not like his pictures at first, but I think you will come to see that they are very wonderful, and they remind us, too, that no one need paint things like what they are in real life if one doesn't want to.

The other great Spanish painter, Velasquez, was very different. There are no whirling and leaping shapes, no fierce lights and darkneses in his pictures. His people are very quiet and still. They sit or stand in rooms or open spaces full of calm, silvery air. He makes you feel that his figures are real and solid and alive, but he does so without any of those tricks of strong lights and shadows and colours used by the other painters I have told you of. And yet you feel sure, as you look at the people in his pictures, that the air and quiet daylight are all round them, that you yourself might slip into the picture and walk all round them. He is like a conjurer: he does the trick and you can't make out, at first, how on earth he does it. But if you study his pictures, you see at last that he does it by the careful way he chooses different shades of colour. Though the whole picture may have no more colour in it than grey and black and stone-colour, he uses the different shades of grey or stone-colour, so that one shade seems to stand forward out of the canvas and another to shrink

away into the back of the picture. And not only this: he works wonders by the very way he uses his brush. Sometimes he uses it to make what seem to be rough strokes and dabs, and yet when you move to a distance you see that the dab turns out to be the hollow in the silk of a woman's sleeve or the bright light in the eye of a child. In fact, he was so clever with his brush that he could lay on what seems, when looked at close, a great muddle of strokes, but turns out, at a distance, to be a marvellously real and smooth face.

When we leave Velasquez and turn to the Flemish painter Rubens, everything is different. Instead of the quiet greys and silvers, the cool, still air and the still figures, we see a riot of brilliant colours and movements. Velasquez's painting is like the sound of violins and 'cellos: Rubens's is like a whole brass band. It seems that he has got together every colour he could find, and any number of paint-brushes, and huge squares of canvas as big as the floor of a room, and then had started painting furiously. Everything seems to be *made* of colour. There are horses made of colour, plunging about in other colours; shapes of men, women, and wild beasts, all made of colour and all in a great whirl of movement. Even when he paints a quiet picture, a portrait of a man sitting still perhaps, you still see the wealth of colour and the dash and sureness with which he used his brush.

I told you how the Venetians began to make pictures out of colour itself instead of out of carefully drawn lines. Rubens does the same, only he

does it very much more thoroughly than they did; and he does it not only with colours but with shapes. It is as if he made his pictures out of some many-coloured elastic material—like the brightly coloured, stretchy stuff that sweet-makers make into sweets—which he had stretched and twisted and patted and curled till at last he had turned it into a great tangle of complicated shapes and colours which, as the result of Rubens's juggling, turns out to be trees and clouds and horses and naked or gorgeously dressed men and women. And Rubens, you feel, did not look upon each of these shapes as existing by itself, but simply as a part of the one, complete, complicated shape of his picture. I do not mean that his pictures are wild or confused. Far from it. Rubens was always very careful that each picture, whatever it was of, should have a beautiful three-dimensional pattern and a beautiful colour effect. Like the Florentines, he loved to paint the human body both naked and clothed, and the people he imagines are large and plump, full of life and health and strength, just as his painting is full of the richness and joy of life.

Now there is a thing worth noticing about the work of all the painters in the world up to this time, which is this: that when they set about painting a picture they always chose for their subject things that are beautiful in themselves. It never occurred to them that they could make a beautiful picture out of something that was not in itself beautiful. Rembrandt, who many people think is the greatest painter in the world, was the first to show us that it doesn't matter at all whether you choose a

beautiful or an ugly thing to paint, whether you choose the goddess Venus or a hideous old beggar, a bunch of lilies or a pair of worn-out boots. The only thing that matters is that the picture you make of it is beautiful, and, as you know, a picture is beautiful when its design and colour-scheme are beautiful.

Now as soon as that truth was discovered, painting became a much wider thing than it had been before, because it means that there is nothing in the whole world that you can't make a picture out of. The painter before Rembrandt thought that you could paint only noble and beautiful and wonderful things: but Rembrandt showed us that one can paint anything, however ugly and horrible, and yet make a beautiful picture of it. No one but a very great painter could have discovered such a thing, and Rembrandt is such a great painter that, in looking at his pictures, you forget that they are pictures. You don't notice the marvellous skill of the painting: all you feel is that you are in the presence of something enormously real, something you can't escape from and don't want to escape from. You don't feel that Rembrandt painted a picture just to please you or make something nice to hang on the wall. He painted it, you feel, because it was so real in his mind that it had to be painted. His pictures don't just smile at you, as even the wildest of Rubens's do: they swallow you whole. Rubens's pictures, hung on a wall, seem to be beautiful decorations, so do Velasquez's and Titian's and Tintoretto's, even though their people are as real as real can be. But when you see a

Rembrandt hanging on a wall, it doesn't occur to you that it is a beautiful decoration, though as a matter of fact it is. What you feel is that its frame is a window-frame through which you are looking into a real, mysterious, and wonderful new world.

CHAPTER VI

THE DUTCH

REMBRANDT was not the only artist of his day in Holland, though he was certainly the greatest. During the forty years that followed the date of his birth, which is the year 1606, many painters were born, and soon a swarm of delightful pictures were being painted in Holland. But before I tell you about them I want to go back and talk about what was happening in the Netherlands (the Netherlands, as you know, is another name for Holland and Belgium) when the earlier Florentines were at work in Italy. When Masaccio, Uccello, and Castagno were busy at work in Florence, a very fine painter called Jan van Eyck and his brother were painting pictures in the Netherlands. Facing this page you will see a picture painted by Jan of a man called Arnolfini and his Wife which is in the National Gallery.

You will at once see that this picture is very different from the sort of picture the Florentines were turning out. In the first place, if any of the Florentines of that time painted a picture of people in a room, it was sure to be a religious picture, a picture of a scene in the life of Jesus

Christ or some saint. But this picture of van Eyck's is a portrait of two ordinary people. I do not mean that the Florentines did not paint portraits. Castagno and many others painted some fine portraits, but in them you see little else than the persons painted, who are standing or sitting against a plain background; and more usually the Italian painters of those days, and for a long time to come, painted just the head and shoulders when they painted a portrait. Even the Venetians, who were great portrait painters, more usually painted the head and shoulders, and they never bothered much about the background.

But van Eyck, you see, has bothered a great deal about the background, in fact he shows us his two people standing in one particular room of their house. In the case of most of the Italians, a portrait is a portrait and nothing else; but this picture is not simply a portrait, it is also a picture of a room with two people in it. And van Eyck has not only paid attention to the faces of his two people, for you see how very carefully he has painted the chandelier that hangs from the ceiling, and the little mirror on the wall at the back in which you can actually see the reflection of the room. (You will see, by the way, that it is the sort of mirror I mentioned before, which turns all the straight lines in the room itself into curves.) And he has put an apple on the window-sill and a pair of funny-looking shoes on the floor in front of Arnolfini, to say nothing of the little dog. In fact he has got quite excited about painting a pleasant room with pleasant things in it and the light coming into

it from the window on the left. He has painted the room for its own sake and not merely as a background or setting for the people in it, as the Italians did at this time.

You will remember that I said something about the different ways of painting a picture and called the different kinds of pictures A, B, C, and D kinds.¹ Well, this picture of van Eyck's comes very near to being a C kind, for he has studied the mirror and chandelier and shoes one by one and painted them with marvellous distinctness, much more, in fact, than you would find in any Florentine picture. And yet it is not entirely the C kind of picture, because van Eyck has been rather careful about light and shadow: he has not painted everything in the room exactly as he knew it to be, but has made some things look dim where they are in the shade, and the mirror, you see, is lighter on the side that is near the window and more shadowy on the other side. So that there is something of the B kind also in this picture.

I told you that the Florentines began to get interested in human beings and the naked body instead of painting solemn figures of the Virgin and Saints, so that even when they did paint Virgins and Saints and Jesus Christ, as they very often did, they made them look like human beings. Well, it was natural that this interest in human beings should make them think of painting portraits, but what they had not yet got very excited about was the homes they lived in, their rooms and all their various possessions in the rooms. But Jan

¹ See pages 44 to 46.

van Eyck was different. He, as you see, was already quite excited about the rooms and the possessions as well as about the people, and the artists who began to paint in the Netherlands after Rembrandt—the painters who are known as the Dutch school—were very fond of painting rooms with people in them—people talking, or sitting at tables drinking, or playing on guitars or ancient pianos—and not only that, but all sorts of scenes which have to do with everyday life in the home, such as a cook among her pots and pans, a servant coming in with a bucket from the well, a heap of fruit or vegetables or game, or a bunch of flowers. And they painted country views and town views, sheep, cattle, people skating on a snowy day, peasants laughing and eating and drinking in inns, and the insides and outsides of churches. In fact they painted, for their own sakes, all those scenes (and a great many more besides) which the Italians painted only as backgrounds or settings for the human figure.

There is another striking difference between these Dutch painters and the Florentines. The Florentines, except when they painted portraits, spent most of their time (as I have already told you) painting either saints and people out of the Bible or people out of old stories; but these Dutch painters painted *only* the people they saw about them. It was their own neighbours, their own homes, their own country, that they were interested in. That was enough for them, and they seldom bothered their heads about other lands or other days.

Another thing you will notice in their paintings is how extraordinarily good they were at painting substance and texture. When they painted a copper jug, they managed to make it look not merely the colour of copper, but hard and shiny like copper; and when they painted the cloth of a dress or a tablecloth, you can tell at once whether it is thick cloth or thin, whether it is linen or wool or silk or satin or brocade. It was as if they had all suddenly realized how beautiful a room full of all these things could be when a cool daylight shone in through the windows and shed quiet light and shadows on them. They never shut their eyes and tried to imagine wonderful things to paint: they opened their eyes wide and gazed and gazed at all the delightful things they saw around them, noticed how light from a window casts a pearly sheen on a plaster wall or makes a bright, cold, silvery gleam on the curve of a glazed pot, or how a polished marble floor shows a blurred reflection of a red tablecloth. In their pictures of rooms and the insides of churches you seem to see not only the visible things there, but even the cool air that fills them.

The picture facing page 60 by Pieter de Hooch is a good example of one sort of Dutch painting. It is not one of the very best, but I have put it in this book because it shows you so very clearly, when you compare it with the other pictures that come before it, what a great change had come over painting. For who, in the grand old Italian days, would have thought for a moment that a picture, and a very delightful picture, could be made out of

a backyard? The Florentines and Venetians would have laughed at the idea. For it was not till the days of Rembrandt and the Dutchmen that painters discovered the beauty that lies in common things and the beauty that can be made out of things not in themselves beautiful.

You see, then, that what the Dutchmen did was to bring into picture painting the common things of daily life. Rubens painted furious imaginary battles, or pomps and festivals, or portraits of grand people; Velasquez and El Greco painted grand people or saints and people from the Bible, and the great Italians did the same. They never, or hardly ever, thought of painting Tom, Dick, and Harry, and the homes they lived in, and their pots and pans and sheep and cattle. But the honest Dutch painters painted nothing else. They did not bother about having grand and pompous, or religious, or imaginary subjects for their pictures: they painted and made beautiful the common or garden life of every day in their own Holland.

The greatest of the Dutch painters, except, of course, Rembrandt, was Vermeer. Almost all his pictures are of Dutch rooms with people in them. He fills his rooms with cool light. The soft, transparent shadows are not darkness, but a light which is dimmer and greyer than the light of the room. He loves to use yellow, blue, and grey in his pictures. The light and shadow falling on the things in the room are painted with such marvellous rightness and delicacy that everything is perfectly modelled and perfectly in the place he means it to be in. For instance, by the way he

paints a chair and the wall behind it, you can see at once that the chair is just four inches in front of the wall. In a picture of his in the National Gallery called 'Lady at the Virginals' (*Virginals* is a name for an ancient kind of piano), we see this sure way he has of putting things in their right places in a room. And we see, too, what a very simple design he gives to some of his pictures. There are only five things in this room, and four of them are things made up of square shapes. Except for the round, beautifully modelled figure of the lady, there is nothing but two square pictures, the oblong box of the virginals, and the square-seated chair.

Some people say that Vermeer is the most wonderful painter in the world. They do not mean by this that he painted the finest pictures, but that he was the most skilful in painting—in laying-on colour—so as to make things seem to be solid and to be really standing in exactly the places in which they are put. Sometimes he breaks away from his simplicity and fills his room with rich shadowy curtains, silk hangings, figures half in light and half in dark shadow, so that the picture is full of large patches of light and darkness. But still the whole effect is quiet and calm and cool, everything (flat or solid) has just the right texture and the right light on it for its texture and its position in the room, and everything, though it forms part of one single picture, is perfectly complete and real in itself.

There are other Dutch painters who painted pictures of this type. Pieter de Hooch, whose picture you have seen at page 60, did some very

fine paintings of rooms. The colours in them are livelier than in Vermeer's: there are scarlets and pinks. But even at his very best he is never so rare an artist as Vermeer, and at his worst he can be very careless and slovenly. Another fine painter is Terboch, but I do not think his pictures have the seriousness and the reality of Vermeer's. I cannot help feeling that he was too anxious to paint a pretty picture for you to admire, and not anxious enough to make something real and serious to satisfy himself. Or perhaps it was that he was more easily satisfied than Vermeer was. Maes, Metsu, and Jan Steen all did work of this type, very good when they were at their best, but none of them *always* very good indeed as Vermeer was.

Now there is one great danger for artists who get too excited about all the things they see around them, and it is this: that if they get too keen on copying pots and pans and silks and satins and fruit and vegetables and making them look exactly like the real thing, they may forget that a picture must be, first and foremost, a beautiful pattern in beautiful colour, a thing not really copied from outside things but from the wonderful imaginations inside the painter's mind. That is what Rubens never forgot. Rubens's pictures look as if he had taken some many-coloured elastic material and twisted and knotted it into a single mass of wonderful and exciting shapes, so that, although you may not know it at the time, the beauty of the shape and colour is the first thing that delights you, and it is not really till a second or two later that the wonderful tangled shape turns out to be . . . what-

ever it *does* turn out to be. Like Rubens, Vermeer never forgot that a picture must be first and foremost a picture, and so long as the other Dutch artists remembered that, it didn't matter a pin how many real-looking pots and pans and chairs and tables they put into their pictures. But a bad painter in this style doesn't think of his picture as a whole, and so his picture is not a single beautiful thing but a mere jumble of separate things—quite a nice, amusing affair perhaps, but more like a photograph than a work of art. But look again at the picture by Jan van Eyck facing page 53. No picture could be fuller of all sorts of little separate pictures of different things. Yet all these separate things combine to make one single picture of beautiful shape and colour. That is the difference between a good picture and a bad one.

CHAPTER VII

LANDSCAPE

IF you look at any large collection of Dutch pictures, such as the one in the National Gallery, you will notice that there are a great many country scenes among them, and very often they are pictures of the country alone, without any human beings in them. The Dutch, in fact, were the first painters who painted the country for its own sake and not merely as a background for people.

The earlier painters were not very much interested in the country. What they wanted to paint, as we discovered when we were talking about the Florentines and the Venetians, was the human body, and when they painted mountains and plains and rivers and distant towns, they did so simply to make a pleasant background for their human figures.

It is very interesting to look at a lot of Florentine and Venetian pictures, and notice how, though they always painted people, they became, as time went on, more and more interested in their background of landscape. You have very likely discovered for yourself that to draw a landscape that looks real is no easy matter. It is not at all easy, when one comes

to try, to give the effect of distance. As you know, things get smaller and smaller as they get farther into the distance. And not only that: things that are really far apart seem to get closer and closer to one another the farther they get away from you, so that two houses that are really half a mile from one another, seem, when you see them at a distance, to be very small and only a few inches apart. Then the colour of things changes with their distance, and it changes differently on different days. And even this is not all. Besides the things on the earth, the landscape painter has to paint the sky, and this difficult business of distance has to be considered for clouds just as much as for trees and houses.

Now let us go back to the Italians and see what sort of a job they made of the landscapes they put into their pictures. Look again at the picture by Pollaiuolo of Hercules killing the Hydra, at page 21. Behind the figures of Hercules and the Hydra Pollaiuolo has painted a small, flat landscape that stretches into the distance, with a river curling through it. It is all very well in its way, but you do not feel that there is anything very real or very interesting about it. It is there, not because Pollaiuolo felt very excited about it, but because he wanted to provide some sort of a place for Hercules and the Hydra to fight in, and also because he knew that if he made it look very low and very flat, as he has done, Hercules and the Hydra would look very large and important by comparison. But you don't feel for a moment that you could go into that landscape and walk about in it, and you don't feel compelled to remark how

very well Pollaiuolo has done it. What you feel is that, in this picture, the landscape isn't the point.

In another picture of Pollaiuolo's in the National Gallery—'The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian'—there is a very much finer landscape; but then this is a very much bigger picture. Here Pollaiuolo has painted a real piece of country, the valley of the Arno with the town of Florence in the distance. But even this one, extraordinarily good though it is, is intended to be nothing more than a background for the great figures of Saint Sebastian and the archers who are shooting at him.

Look now at Verocchio's picture of the Virgin and Child facing page 28. There is a very charming little bit of landscape there, beautifully and delicately done, but very small in comparison with the figures that almost fill the picture. You will notice too, if ever you get a chance of looking at the original picture, that Verocchio has used only three colours—green, brown, and, for the distant hills, blue—for this landscape. Now you know well enough yourself that, to paint a picture of a piece of countryside, you would need not three, but three or four or five times three colours if you wanted to make it look real and deep and solid and full of lights and shadows. But green, brown, and blue were enough for Pollaiuolo and Verocchio, and they were enough for the other Florentines. They seem to have felt that the fellow, whoever it was, who invented the green-brown-blue way of painting the country had invented a trick that was good enough for them. And the surprising thing is how extremely well they make it serve its

purpose. We feel, in fact, that if it had been the fashion to paint landscape in those days, some of the Florentines would have painted some very beautiful ones, just as beautiful as some of the earlier Dutch painters did.

Now let us try a later Florentine. Piero di Cosimo was between twenty and thirty years younger than Verocchio. He is a very wideawake and delightful artist: perhaps he will have discovered something new. But nothing of the sort. There is a lovely picture of his in the National Gallery called 'The Death of Procris' in which there is an unusually large landscape. Procris is lying dead with an arrow in her throat: a satyr has come out of the wood and is kneeling looking sadly at her, and a large brown dog is sitting doing the same. Behind them is a great landscape of shore, lake, and distant hills, a landscape that is very charming and much more real than many that were painted at the time. And yet Piero di Cosimo has been content to use the good old green-brown-blue trick. He certainly uses it very well, so that we very nearly feel that we might walk into the landscape and go for a row on the lake. But the country it shows us is rather a sad country, for there is no light and no air in it, because at that time no one had discovered how to paint light and give a feeling of air to a picture. And not only could they not paint the country very well, but they could not paint the sea either. In fact they made a worse job of the sea than of the country. The fact was that they did not take the trouble to watch the sea: they were too busy watching people. And so, when they

have to paint the sea, as in the case of Botticelli's famous picture of Venus sailing on a cockle-shell, they cover it over with funny little ripples all exactly alike, but none of them in the least like any ripple that was ever seen on a real sea. It is good enough so long as you don't look at it too carefully; and you are not meant to look at it very carefully, you are meant to be looking at Venus with her wonderful heavy golden hair.

But if we are looking out for landscape, we had better have another look at the painter Perugino, who lived in beautiful, calm Umbria with its quiet light and its hills like the backs of sleeping whales, and who managed to put so much of the feeling of that country into his pictures. In his paintings we see that air and light are beginning to get into Italian art, even if the light is no brighter than that of a peaceful evening. Perugino, you see, was really interested in landscape for its own sake: in fact, his fault as a figure painter is that he is sometimes more interested in the landscape than he is in his figures, though they are the chief part of his pictures. If there had been such a thing as landscape painting in those days, Perugino would certainly have turned into a landscape painter.

And what about the Venetians? Even in the pictures of Giovanni Bellini, who was painting in Venice at the same time as Pollaiuolo and Verocchio were painting in Florence and Perugino in Umbria, landscape is becoming an important part of the picture, and with Giorgione it suddenly becomes very important indeed. Now at last trees become deep and rich and mysterious, as real trees

are, and it is no longer early morning or evening. Full daylight has risen at last in the world of pictures and filled it with lights and shadows. The country has awakened from its pale dawn and become alive and ripe and summery. You can see this again, as you have seen it already, in Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne'. The country there is no mere background. It has begun to creep forward and surround the figures: it has become a little world enclosing the crowd of men, women, and animals.

But, even now, painters had not begun to paint landscape for its own sake. It was still, though not any longer a mere background, a place which had been provided for the human beings in the picture. Figures were still the most important things to the painter, or at least he still pretended they were, for he gave them the chief positions in the design, even though, by this time, they were sometimes small in comparison with the landscape. But landscape was certainly coming into its own. In the work of the old painters there was no landscape at all. Then, when it did appear, the figures almost crowded it out altogether. But now the landscape was beginning to crowd out the figures, and soon we shall find that the figures have gone and there is nothing but landscape, that landscape painting has become a full-fledged art.

Meanwhile, as landscape was slowly growing in Italian pictures, the same thing was happening in the pictures of Flemish artists: for there were some very fine painters in Flanders in those days,

whom I have been obliged to leave out of this book so as to make room for the Italians. The Flemish artists had actually made an earlier start with landscape than the Italians, and even as early as the days of Jan van Eyck the landscape background had got much further than it had in Italy. But in Flemish pictures, as in the Italian, the green-brown-blue trick was used. We can trace in the Flemish, as we have done in the Italian, the growing importance of landscape, till at last it has become at least as important as the figures, and sometimes even more so. Both Italian and Flemish painting, in fact, reached at last the point where landscape was ready to push out figures altogether and occupy the picture by itself.

When we turn to the Dutch School and to the two great French painters Poussin and Claude, we see that this really happens. Poussin was born in 1594 and Claude in 1600. They left France and went to live in Rome when they were quite young and stayed there almost all their lives. When Poussin got to Italy Tintoretto had been dead for thirty-two years, but his example and that of the other great Venetians was still being followed there, though the great days of painting were over in Italy.

Poussin's earlier pictures are very like the later ones of Titian: you can see some for yourself in the National Gallery and can compare them with Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne.' But as time went on, Poussin became more and more keen about landscape painting, and at last he took to painting pure landscape, as in this picture of his called 'Phocion' on the next page. Now the old painters



POUSSIN. PHOCION

who used landscape as a background for their figures were always very careful, as you know, to make their figures into a beautiful design, but they didn't bother so much about working the landscape into the design. After all, there was so little of it, and it was so unimportant compared with the figures, that there was no need for them to do so. But as landscape became more important and pushed its way into the picture until it took up as much room as the figures themselves, the artists had to turn their attention to making it as much a part of the design as the figures; in fact, figures and landscape had to be woven into one single, complete design. And when figures disappeared from the picture altogether, or became no more important than a small rock or tree-stump, then landscape design became a very important matter.

I have already, at the very beginning of this book, said something about landscape design. I pointed out that a painter, unlike a photographer, could move trees and barns and horse-troughs about as he liked, until he got them into a position in which they fitted into the pattern of his picture. Now Poussin was a great pattern-maker. For him, trees and rocks and hills were, first and foremost, shapes to be moved about and arranged, some in front, others in the middle distance, others in the far distance, until he had got them into the pattern he had chosen for his picture. You can see what a beautiful deep pattern this picture of his has. But it is more than a pattern: it is a rich, ripe country scene, full of deep shadows and distance and still air.

Claude, the other Frenchman, was as excited about design as Poussin was, but his pictures are less severe, less noble. They are gentler and more delicate; and, besides this, they have a greater variety of light, for Claude painted light as no one had done before him. It is true that sunlight had already blazed out in the world of painting: we see it in the landscapes of Rubens and Rembrandt. But in Claude's pictures sunlight fills the very air, making it misty with too much light; distant things fade into each other, and the far distance melts into light and air.

It was natural for the Dutch to paint landscape, for they had their eyes wide open to everything round about them in Holland, and so were just as ready to paint a landscape as they were to paint figures in a room or pots and pans and backyards and bunches of flowers. When we turn from Poussin and Claude to these Dutch painters we see that most of them were not so particular about landscape design. Design or pattern, you see, is a thing that a man makes out of his imagination. He does not find it in the world outside; he makes it up in his head and arranges the things of the outside world until they fit into the design he has imagined. But the Dutch always had their eyes wide open and painted the world around them. The difference between painters like Poussin and Claude and the Dutch painters (except a few who went to Rome like Poussin and Claude and studied design there) is that the first make a design in their imaginations and then take from the outside world the things they want to fit into it, while the Dutch

kind of painters get excited first about the things in the outside world and then do what they can to give them enough design to turn them into pictures.

But landscape painting is not only a matter of working various things on the earth into a design—the trees, rocks, mountains, houses and so on. The sky, too, has to be made part of the design. Now it is all very well to work solid and stationary things such as figures, trees, rocks, fields, mountains, and houses, into a design, but to do so to the sky, which is made up of vague things that are always changing—clouds, lights, and shadows—must have been, when painters first began to try to do this, exceedingly difficult. And it is a difficulty that the Dutch painters could not shirk, because Holland is a flat country and therefore the sky is a very important part of every view; in fact, you will notice in many Dutch pictures that the sky takes up very much more of the picture than the earth does. Perhaps it is because the earth is so flat in Holland and there is so much sky, that few of the Dutch landscape painters were such masters of design as Poussin and Claude.

CHAPTER VIII

LANDSCAPE AGAIN

ONE of the earliest of the Dutch landscape painters was van Goyen, who was born a year after Poussin. He paints generally in dull tones, browns and greys and greens, but he uses these few colours so knowingly and in such a wonderful variety of shades that you do not feel that his pictures are dull. They seem full of the richness and variety of nature itself. His use of colours is really just as much of a trick as the earlier painters' brown-green-blue trick, but it is a trick which, when performed by a skilful artist like van Goyen, produces the most beautiful and satisfying results. The fact is, you see, that whenever you paint anything at all, you have to use some sort of trick, for the art of painting is itself a trick, a trick that makes people believe that they are looking at something different from what they are really looking at, which is really nothing but a piece of paper or canvas or a plaster wall covered with dabs and streaks of paint: and a trick, too, which makes them think they are looking at solid, three-dimensional rocks and houses and people, when they are really looking at perfectly flat shapes on a perfectly flat

surface. Van Goyen's trick was a fairly simple trick, but he did wonderful and elaborate things with it.

The greatest of all the Dutch landscape painters (except Rembrandt, who painted some gorgeous landscapes), was Jacob van Ruisdael, who was born about thirty-three years after van Goyen. Just as the Florentines studied the human body till they could make it look solid and round and could show its quick and powerful movements, so Ruisdael studied trees and rocks, and the strong solid movements of waterfalls and clouds. And he was a master of design too, and you generally find, if you look carefully and for a long time at his pictures, that what has delighted you so much in them, and made you feel at once that they are very good, is just as much the beautiful design he has made out of trees, rocks, and great stretches of land and cloudy sky, as the wonderful truth and solidity that he has given to all these things. He often thrills and excites us in his pictures, and strengthens the effect of his design, by putting in a bright patch of sunlight where all else is painted in dark tones.

His friend and pupil Hobbema, though not so fine an artist as he, also painted some very good pictures, pictures which are gay and lighter than the rich, sombre work of Ruisdael.

Now what about the A, B, C, and D ways of painting pictures? The C way is to paint everything in the picture as exactly as possible as you know it to be. Such a picture would be a lot of little pictures of separate things all fitted together into one design. It is the design that makes them all

into one picture and leads your eye on one particular part, the chief point of the picture. Now if you painted a landscape in the C way you might make a very nice picture, but it would not be like anything we see in the world outside, because when we look at a view we never see everything in it exactly as it really is. Each thing is altered by having part of itself in shadow and part in light or by being made vague by the haze of distance. Besides this, we cannot see a whole lot of things together quite clearly, because our eyes can only look at one thing at a time and the things we are not looking at seem to be nothing more than vague shapes and colours.

The kind of landscape that Poussin and Claude painted is the B kind. Your eye is drawn by the design to something clearly seen and the other things are made less clear, more shadowy. And this is also, to some extent, the kind of picture painted by the Dutch landscape painters, though many of their pictures are on the way to becoming the A kind, the kind in which you get a general impression of everything but see nothing perfectly clearly. But it is not until a long time after the Dutch painters were dead and buried that painters began to paint pictures which were completely of the A kind, in which there is nothing at all which is perfectly clear. I shall tell you about them soon.

When we look back over all the painting that has been going on in Europe since the days of the earliest Italian painters, we could almost think that someone has made a rule that fine painting

must always be going on somewhere in Europe. If the Italians get tired of doing it, then the Spanish and the Dutch must get to work. When the Dutch had done what they could do, the English took on the job for a while, and then it was taken over by the French, who show no signs yet of wanting to stop. But I am hurrying on too fast, for we have only just finished with the Dutch.

Hobbema, the pupil of Ruisdael, died in 1709: Richard Wilson, the first English landscape painter, was born in 1714, the year in which Queen Anne died. He went to Rome and there learned something of Poussin's and Claude's careful way of making landscape into a noble design. But Gainsborough, who was born thirteen years later, followed the freer and more natural way of the Dutchmen. Crome followed Wilson, who had followed Poussin and Claude, but he also learned much from the pictures of Dutch artists, of which there were a great many for him to see in collections in England.

Then came a very great painter, Constable, who invented an entirely new way of painting landscape. Claude and Ruisdael had succeeded in putting sunlight into painting, but Constable was the first to discover how to paint the sheen and sparkle of trees and fields and water in sunlight or even in mere daylight, and to bring something of all the rich colouring of nature into his landscapes. There was nothing of the brown-green-blue trick, or of the sober greys and browns and greens of van Goyen and Ruisdael, in Constable's pictures. His paintings are full of dabs and blots and streaks of

brilliant colours laid-on close together. And yet the whole effect is not gaudy or dazzling at all: it is rich and sober, but full of the sheen and sparkle of things on which bright daylight is shining. This way of putting bright colours close together was Constable's invention. His pictures look as if they had been painted with great speed but great certainty. He dabs and spatters and streaks his colours on, but all the time he knows very well what he is doing.

Then comes Turner. He follows Poussin's and Claude's way of noble design as well as the free, open-eyed way of the Dutchmen; and besides this he has the wonderful new invention of Constable to guide him. Turner had a very keen eye for all the wonders of the natural world. Nature excited him. Constable had shown painters how to paint trees and all the things of nature sparkling back the light that shines upon them. Turner went still further. As time went on, he painted landscapes so soaked in coloured light and sun-shot mists that everything in them seems to have become mere shapes of mist or rainbow seen through the mists and rainbows of the air. Look at this picture of his called 'Rain, Steam and Speed'. What a long way painting has gone, in this picture, from the C style—that is, from making things exactly as we know them to be. Nothing in this picture is as we know it to be: everything is as it has become after mist and rain and light have blurred and half-hidden it. This is the A kind of picture pure and simple. Even the chief thing in the picture, the dark mass of the engine, is vague and indistinct—



TURNER. RAIN, STEAM AND SPEED
National Gallery, London

not an engine as it really is, but an *impression* of an engine.

But Turner went further than even this. In a picture called 'Petworth Interior' in the Tate Gallery, he does not even give us a hint of things as they really are. We see that the subject of the picture is a large room, or perhaps a large cave, but we could not possibly say what there is in the room. We see that there *are* a lot of things in it, but *what* they are Heaven only knows. Are they tables or chairs or sofas or rabbit-hutches or dustbins or pillar-boxes? We cannot say. For here Turner has gone well on the way towards painting a D kind of picture. If you had watched him at work on that room in Petworth House and had said: 'But that doesn't look like a table. It's more like a pint of spilt claret'; Turner would have replied: 'It is neither a table nor a pint of spilt claret. It is a mass of colour. Perhaps it was suggested to me by that table over there, but that's no business of yours. I am not interested in tables. I am interested in masses of colour.'

Turner died in 1851. His paintings had a great effect on the work of certain French painters who came to be called *Impressionists*. Two of them had been in London twenty years after Turner died, and had become very excited about his pictures because they saw in them many things that they themselves had been trying to do. They had been carefully studying nature, and by nature is meant, this time, not only hills and trees and rocks and water, but also the different kinds of lights and mists and the effects they have on all these things.

They wanted to paint nature as a collection of coloured shapes, though they did not, as Turner did in his last pictures, cease to be interested in what these shapes really were.

Meanwhile, following the Dutchmen and Constable, there had been another school of landscape painting in France called the Barbizon school. This school carried on Ruisdael's and Hobbema's way of painting landscape. But I shall not tell you any more about them, because I cannot make room for everybody in this book, and I want to tell you about the *Impressionists*. Like Turner, the Impressionists painted things not as they really are, but in all the different ways in which they appear out-of-doors. They saw, as everybody sees, that the appearance of things changes every moment with the moving of the sun and the wind, the moving of the months from summer to winter and back again to summer, and with the amount of dryness or moisture in the air. Well, they said they would go out-of-doors and paint all this, instead of painting scenes thought-over and slowly worked-out in a studio. They would paint, in fact, the *impression* of the moment.

You probably know that the colour of light is all the colours of the rainbow mixed together, and light can be broken up by water, as in a rainbow, or by a glass prism, so that you can see all the separate colours of which it is made up. These colours are called the spectrum. Pissarro, one of the founders of Impressionism, said that painters ought to use no colours but these, and that they must make all the colours in their pictures by

putting these spectrum colours closely together or across one another. Now Constable had already invented the way of putting bright colours close together in streaks so as to give the effect of light shining on things, but he had not used only the colours of the spectrum. The Impressionists were the first to do that, and by using these pure colours they were able to get very beautiful and lively effects.

Nothing, for the Impressionists, is real and solid and separate: everything we see is simply a collection of colours. And if we go simply by what our eyes teach us, then we may say, with the Impressionists, that all the various shapes we see—houses, fields, trees, shadows, animals, human beings, everything—are simply things made up of colours; though our sense of touch teaches us that, as a matter of fact, many things are liquid or solid.

The result of this idea is that landscape painting and figure painting cease to be two different departments of painting and become one—the painting of coloured shapes. For what the Impressionists are concerned with is light, and the only way in which we can see light is by the things it shines upon. These Impressionists, then, are just as much figure painters as landscape painters. So now I must go back and tell you something of what has been happening in figure painting since we left it with the Dutchmen.

CHAPTER IX

THE FRENCH

WHEN the Dutchmen had finished their share of the world's painting, art moved to France. That is not quite true. Painting had already been going on in France for some time; but now, except for the outbreak in England of which I have already said something, France became the country of great painters. As for figure painting, ever since Rubens and Velasquez and Rembrandt and the Dutch stopped painting there have been no great figure painters (excepting only a great Spaniard called Goya, whom unfortunately I must leave out) but the French, or painters who have settled in France and become French painters.

There was a very fine French painter called Watteau who was born in 1684, which is just two years after the Frenchman Claude and the Dutchman Hobbema died. Watteau was a great admirer of the paintings of Rubens and followed in his footsteps, but his pictures do not make one think, at first, of Rubens's pictures, because they are not pictures of gods and goddesses and heroes and battles and scenes from Bible stories. They are pictures of ladies and gentlemen in fancy dress

picnicking or dancing or playing guitars in well-kept forests. This was the kind of picture that the gay people at the French court wanted for their drawingrooms, and so this was the kind of picture into which Watteau put his wonderful art. If he had not been such a fine artist we should have felt that pictures of this sort were not to be taken very seriously; and, even as it is, we cannot help thinking that art has turned its back on the serious and noble things of life and become too much interested in providing pretty decorations for drawingrooms. And we feel this still more in the painters who followed Watteau, delightful though their pictures are. There is too little of the real, thrilling, noble things of life in them and too much of the life of drawingrooms and tea-parties. But the tea-parties and picnics and fancy-dressing-up of all these charming, idle people came suddenly to an end, swept from the face of the earth by the French Revolution.

For just as the Revolution swept away the gay, aristocratic life of the French court, so it wrecked this charming drawingroom art. Napoleon was not interested in picnics. What he wanted was to be dressed up as a Roman Emperor: everything now was to be Roman. It is still fancy-dress, but a sterner, less pretty, and much less idle variety of dressing-up than in the old days. So David, the chief painter of these days, painted pictures full of Romans and took to copying Roman sculpture as Mantegna did. It was all very fine and noble, but rather cold and rather dull.

Ingres, a much greater painter than David,

thought that art ought to go back, not to the Romans, but to the Greeks. But he did not copy the Greeks: he followed their example. Now the Greeks, as you may know, were great sculptors, so when an artist takes the Greeks for his example it means that he draws figures all carefully bounded by lines and does not make his pictures out of colour, with one colour fading into another, as the Venetians did. The Venetians, Rubens, and Rembrandt had driven pure line out of painting. Ingres brought line back. Many of his pictures are of naked or half-naked figures drawn in beautiful clear lines. Everything else in these pictures is mere background or decoration, put in to show off the figures. Like Giotto, Ingres drew so wonderfully that by his line alone he could make the shapes of his figures look solid. As for colour, he just put it on between the lines, as the Florentines did. The whole beauty of these pictures was in their marvellous drawing and modelling. You hardly notice their colour. The figures do not seem alive or dead: they are simply *there*—beauty in an empty airless space without light or shadow. If the drawing and modelling were not so wonderful as to delight and satisfy us by themselves, such pictures would seem horribly dull and lifeless.

But when Ingres was at work, another very great French artist was at work too, who filled his pictures with gorgeous colour and light and life. His figures are not alone and cold and pure in their beauty. Colour and light and movement make them alive: there is light and air around

them, and the figures and everything else in these pictures become one single, rich, complicated shape made out of pure colour. This artist's name was Delacroix.

These two great painters, Ingres and Delacroix, became examples for all the artists who came after them. Corot, who was born in 1796, ten years after Ingres, had something of his purity, but he put life and warmth into his figures. He was a great man with tones, as Velasquez was. By using different shades of quiet colours he surrounded his figures with light and air (and his landscapes too, for he was also a great landscape painter) and made them seem a part of their surroundings. Everything in his pictures is soft and delicate and pearly, but never weak.

There was nothing soft and delicate about Daumier. He studied drawing from Greek and Roman sculpture, but there is no clear, cool line, no quiet purity in his pictures, which are great masses of solid light and darkness and grim shapes. Courbet, who painted solidly modelled figures, was called brutal by the people of his time, who were accustomed to the unreal purity of Ingres, the noble and brilliantly coloured figures of Delacroix, and the delicate and poetic naked figures of Corot. To them, Courbet's naked figures, which were those of real, solid, everyday people, seemed extremely coarse. They could not see in them the beauty and nobility that strike us at once.

Manet, a painter thirteen years younger than Courbet, disliked this side of Courbet's art too, but for a different reason. He said that a picture

ought to be a flat decoration, not a scene full of real, solid things. He did not mean by this that a picture ought to be two-dimensional like a Byzantine mosaic or a rug. By saying it must be 'decoration' he was reminding people that the design is very important (a thing which Courbet sometimes forgot), and by 'flat' he meant that nothing must be modelled and shaded, although you could have one flat colour behind another, as in stage scenery. If you look at Manet's pictures you see at once that they are perfectly three-dimensional. But he thought that too much attention had been paid to making things look round and solid, and not enough to pattern and design. He laughed at Courbet's keenness about modelling and said that all he was excited about was billiard balls (because, when you come to think of it, a billiard ball is about the roundest thing there is): and Courbet laughed at Manet's idea about flatness and said that one of his pictures looked like the Queen of Spades coming from her bath.

Manet became, after a time, closely connected with the painters who were called Impressionists. With him and the painters of his time and the time that follows, landscape painting and figure painting are one and the same thing.

Before we go on to the Impressionists, let us look back and notice what has happened in painting during all this time. We see, hundreds of years ago, the Byzantines making pictures out of flat patterns. These are pictures of pure line. The Florentines also used line, but they practised line



CÉZANNE. LANDSCAPE AT AIX

until it could show the roundness and movement and vigour of the human body. But *round* means three-dimensional. Painting, with the Florentines, was still line painting, but it was no longer flat. Then came the Venetians. They began to use colour as if it were clay. Lines, in their pictures, grow blurred; there are lights and shadows; one shape fades into another. Rubens left line still further behind: his pictures are a whirl of masses and colours. In the great lights and darkneses of Rembrandt, line is lost in paint; and in Velasquez the place of line has been taken by tones—the delicate use of different shades of one colour which makes some parts of, say, a woman's sleeve, look nearer or further away than others.

Then, as if it had somehow been discovered that line had been too long forgotten, come David and Ingres, bringing line back. Ingres almost turns his back on colour altogether: he uses it as little as he can. But immediately Delacroix jumps up and cries out that art must have colour, and he brings to it a richness and brilliance that no artist before him has brought. It seems as if there were something in artists, a sort of common sense, that makes them stop short when painting is beginning to go too far in one direction. They are always rescuing some valuable thing, now line, now colour, now design, which others have thrown away.

The group of painters whom the public christened Impressionists are not really a group at all, for we see some of them doing the very opposite of what others of them are doing. The

only way in which the word Impressionist joins them into one party is that they all painted pictures which were impressions of what they saw in everyday out-of-doors life—the impression of the moment. Turner's picture 'Rain, Steam and Speed' (see page 76) is an impression of a train crossing a viaduct in a rainstorm. It is not a picture of a train and a viaduct, but of a train and a viaduct half hidden by rain. An impressionist painter called Monet (not Manet, whom I have mentioned already) paints the same sort of impressions as this—a cathedral-front, for instance, which is not a great building of stones and mortar, but a vast mass of pink light, because dawn is shining on it. This is not a picture of a cathedral: it is a picture of what happens when you take a cathedral and a certain kind of sunrise and mix them together. Paintings such as these have done away with line: they are made out of colour.

But there is another kind of impressionist, a gorgeous painter called Degas, whose pictures are full of line. He is very fond of painting or drawing, in coloured chalks, scenes on the stage with ballet-dancers. He gives us an impression of a brief moment in a dance, a sort of snapshot that catches one foot in the air and the other just before it leaves the ground. This is impressionist, just as the paintings of Turner and Monet are; but it is a kind which has nothing blurred and hazy about it. It is full of the sharp lines of dancing legs and arms and bodies; and full, too, of the gorgeous colour which Degas used so magnificently. Monet will have nothing to do with line, but Degas was a

follower of the great Ingres and painted pictures which are made out of line.

When we look at a picture by Renoir (another great Impressionist) we feel that there is nothing of the snapshot about it, for it is a picture by a man who has gazed and gazed at the things he is painting until his mind has become soaked with their shape and roundness, their glowing colour, the bloom of the light on them like the bloom on a plum or a grape, and all the flicker and reflection of other lights thrown on to them from other things. He often paints women or girls bathing or sitting naked on river-banks. The bank and the water and the naked bodies are all glowing with the richness of summertime. Everybody is healthy and happy and ripe like ripe fruit. Yet, in spite of the rich bloom of colour which is on everything in the picture and seems to bind it together into one single complicated shape, as the colour of Rubens does, we see at once that Renoir has not given up the use of line. Ingres, who would have hated the pictures of Monet, in which everything is blurred by light or mist, would not have hated Renoir's. And Renoir remembers what Manet said about a picture, that it must be a decoration; for his pictures have beautiful designs. When you first look at one of Renoir's paintings of bathers, you may think that all these bodies look absurdly fat and absurdly pink; but you won't think so for very long. The more you look at them, the richer and deeper and more lovely they seem to be. You feel, when you turn away from them, as if you had been having a glorious summer holiday.

It was Constable who discovered how to put strokes and dabs of brilliant colour close together so as to make a colour that was not always brilliant in itself but, anyhow, had the sparkle and sheen of all colours of the out-of-doors world. The Impressionists added to this discovery by laying down the law that the colours used in this way, and indeed all the colours in a picture, must be only the pure colours of the spectrum, the colours we see in the rainbow. Painters, they said, must use no other colours because Nature uses no other colours.

Now a painter comes along called Seurat, who says that these colours must not be streaked or dabbed on or laid across each other, but must be put on separate, in little round spots, the size of the spots being chosen to agree with the size of the picture, so that a little picture would be made up of tiny spots, and a big picture of big spots, each as big, perhaps, as a good-sized pea. There is a beautiful picture by Seurat in the Tate Gallery painted in this way. You can see the spots only when you go close to it: when you move away they fade into a beautiful soft, misty effect, full of glowing light and colour. But what you will notice about this picture as much as its soft, rich effect, is the wonderful design and the solemn nobility of the shapes of the bathers and loungers. If Seurat had not been a very fine designer his pictures would have been wretched things, little better than squares of tinted cotton-wool.

Signac, another painter who painted in spots, is also a very good designer and very good at colour. The delicate coloured mistiness of his pictures

looks almost as if it had been breathed on to the canvas, rather than put on with a brush. The disadvantage of this kind of painting is that it does away with texture, for when everything is turned into light (light which takes the form of coloured shapes) you cannot make one thing look like iron and another like leather and another like satin. That can be done only by using your brush in a variety of different ways. But in this spotty way of painting, you always use your brush in the same way; in fact you could quite well throw away your brushes and paintbox and have little circles of coloured paper to stick on to your canvas. Everything real and solid melted, in these pictures, into thin air. Here there was no such thing as line. Such painting as this, beautiful though it often was, could lead to nothing. It was time to get back to real things.

Cézanne, one of the greatest names in French or any other painting, was one of those who agreed with Manet. Painting, he said with Manet, must be flat. And he couldn't be bothered with all that business of putting small streaks or dots of pure colour together, nor with Seurat's way of painting in coloured spots. There is no mistiness in his pictures: everything is clear. He was determined to give back to things their real, solid nature. He wanted to show things, not as they are on a certain day, in a certain kind of light, changed and melted by light, but as they always are. In his pictures everything is as simple as it can be. When he paints a hillside covered with fields he paints it in different-coloured patches as if it were a patchwork

quilt, and yet in its whole effect it is nothing like a quilt, or rather it is a quilt with somebody in the bed under it, for the hill is a solid mound. You might compare it to a solid house built of coloured cards. He makes his things solid, not by shading, as the Venetians and Courbet and others did, nor by line, as Giotto and Ingres did, but by the shapes of his patches of colour and by the skilful way he chooses which colour to put next which. For this reason a great deal is lost when his pictures are photographed and the colour is not there; but even without its colour you can see how real and solid and rocky the picture by Cézanne at page 85 is. Everything he painted—whether portraits of people, landscapes, people in landscapes, or bowls of apples—looks, not as it might have looked at one special moment in one special light, but as it will always look in the plain light of day. When he paints apples, as he often did, they are so simple and solid that you almost feel that they are more real than real apples.

You will see now that, though Cézanne agreed with Manet that painting should be flat, his pictures do not look flat any more than Manet's do. They look as deep and three-dimensional as can be; but you might almost say that their depth and solidity are not made by Cézanne but by the colour which he uses. He does not model shapes or put in shadows: all he does is to put dabs and patches of certain colours on his shapes, and the colours do the modelling for him. But the point is that you have to be an extremely clever artist, and very learned about colour, to know what colours

to use so that they *will* do the modelling for you. I will tell you soon about another French artist called Matisse, who is still living, who has become even more learned about colour, and what colour will do, than Cézanne himself.

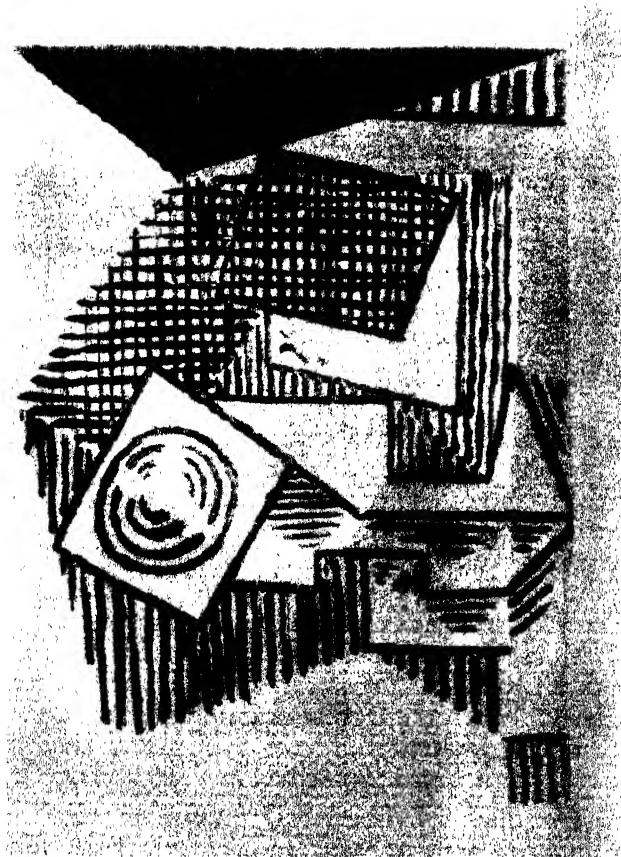
Cézanne was not the only one who was determined to get away from the woolliness of the later Impressionists, and from all this business about different kinds of light, to something clear and simple and real. There was a Dutch painter called van Gogh who had settled in France, and he did the same, though in a different way from Cézanne's way. He used brilliant pure colours in great masses. His pictures are full of greens and yellows and reds and blues which look as if they had been buttered on to the canvas, or streaked on thick with straight sharp brush strokes or sudden twists and curls. As in Cézanne's work, it is the colour that does the modelling, but often van Gogh's brush-strokes do it also, as when he makes the fan-shaped bough of a fir-tree out of a lot of straight brush-strokes arranged in a fan.

Another painter, called Gauguin, was for some time van Gogh's companion. He, too, was determined to get back to simplicity, and not only to a simple way of painting, but to simple people, such as farm-people, for his subjects. At last he left Europe altogether and went to live in remote lands where he lived with the simple savages who inhabited those lands and married one of them. There he painted the naked people and the gorgeously coloured trees and landscapes in magnificent colour and large simple shapes.

These French painters about whom I have told you are a few of the most important ones, but there are a great many others whom I have had to leave out. I shall tell you of only two more, both of them living and painting today. Then I must stop.

Matisse was born in 1869. Picasso is about twelve years younger: he was born in 1881. Both of them, like Giotto and Ingres, can do wonderful things with line. They can draw a human figure in line, without shading and without colour, in such a way that you cannot help seeing it as a mass of solid shapes. One of the things that the Impressionists lost sight of, in their excitement about light and colour, was the texture of things. But there is no lack of texture in Matisse's work. China is china and brass is brass once more. You can see at once whether a curtain is made of thick or thin cloth. And yet, how does he do it? He does it so quickly and so simply that we can't make out *how* he does it. He outlines a shape, and you see at once that it is a bowl—a bowl, perhaps, of wood or metal or china. Then Matisse does something quite simple to it, dabs a coat of paint on it, and, perhaps, puts a streak or two on top of that, and you know at once that the bowl is made of thick glazed pottery.

But the most extraordinary thing that Matisse has done is to discover how to paint three-dimensional pictures in pure flat colour. He knows how to manage colours so that a large patch of pure colour put among certain other large patches of colour looks to be far away in the depths of the picture, while another seems to be close up against the surface.



PICASSO. STILL LIFE

There is a picture of his of a room with a window at the far end of it and a chair in the middle of it with an undressed woman sitting in it. The window is nothing but a perfectly flat patch of bright blue. How is it, we wonder as we look at it, that this blue patch looks to be far away outside the room—a deep, cloudless sky—and that the things in the room seem to be much closer to us? We cannot tell. It must be because a square of blue, when surrounded by black and grey, looks further away than they do. By his discovery of the secret of how colours behave, Matisse is able to paint rooms in which there is hardly a scrap of shadow, and to place walls, window, curtains, chairs, table, even the people sitting in the room, all exactly in their right places, so as to make a beautiful three-dimensional design of brilliant, pure colour. And he can do the same with a landscape. Surely this is the simplest kind of painting there could possibly be, and yet it has taken all these hundreds of years, from the days of the Byzantines to the present time, to reach this simplicity.

Besides this, Matisse is a marvellous decorator. He uses human bodies, wall-papers, carpets, vases, to make marvellous patterns—patterns so full of swing and movement that, as you look at them, you feel that you must move in sympathy with them.

Picasso, a Spaniard who has settled in France, is a wonderful decorator too, and he is many things besides. It seems as if there were nothing he couldn't do. He is always breaking out in new directions. Like the man in *The Mikado*, he is not

only the Lord High Executioner, he is Lord High Everything-Else. But I want to speak of only one of the many things he has done in painting. He has painted Cubist pictures.

A cube, as you very likely know, is a solid square, a thing like a perfectly square box; and *cubic* means solid, three-dimensional. You might say, therefore, that every three-dimensional painting is a cubist painting, and so, strictly speaking, it is. But what Picasso and the other Cubists do, and what is meant by cubist painting, is this. When they paint, say, the human body, they paint it not as it actually is, but as it would be if, instead of being made up of curves and mounds and hollows and tubes, as it is, it were made of different flat-sided blocks with sharp edges and corners where block joins block. Perhaps you have already done some geometry. Well, the Cubists turned everything into geometry; but, of course, into a geometry which, being art, has to be made to look beautiful.

Then some of them went still further and painted things, not as you see them from a certain point of view, but as a mixture of several points of view. In this kind of painting you do not see the thing as you ever see it in real life: you see it rather as if you had photographed several views of it, one upright, one end-on, one tilted this way, one tilted that way, all on the same plate. But it is not quite like this, because the artist has left out any bits that make the picture into a muddle and kept only the bits that make a nice design. But the result is that you can't always see what the picture is about

You may get a hint here and there—something like a bit of a wine-bottle here perhaps, and the curved edge of a violin there—but the picture is nothing more than a beautiful design which has been suggested by these things. In a way, you see, it is a certain variety of the C picture—the picture in which you see things not as you ever see them in reality, but as you happen to know, from previous experience, they are in reality. It is a picture of what we know about things, not of things as we have ever seen them at any particular moment.

But from this kind of painting it is only a short step to the D kind of picture, the picture which is not a picture *of* anything at all, but simply of beautiful shapes and colours, though these shapes and colours may have been suggested by real things. This kind of picture is called an *abstract* picture, which means a picture of shapes *abstracted*, or removed, from the real things that suggested them. Some of these pictures painted by Picasso are extremely attractive. There is one facing page 92 which I think you will agree is very pleasant to look at, though I don't think you will be able to say what it is a picture *of*. You might guess that part of it was a candlestick seen from above, and you might guess right and you might guess wrong. But it really doesn't matter.

But the trouble with this kind of art, as with that of the later Impressionists who drowned everything in light, is that it gets too far away from the solid reality of the outer world. It is too much an art of the mind, and too little an art of the

senses. Besides, Cubist art, whether or not it is abstract, does away with texture, just as Impressionism did. When everything is made of solid, flat-sided shapes with sharp corners and edges, everything becomes hard, just as everything bathed in light becomes woolly.

Picasso must have come to feel that neither Cubism nor Abstract painting would lead very far. Like Impressionism, they are streets with no way out of them but the way you came in by. And so he has given up both. They may both be very charming streets, but in our walk through life we want to go ahead, and so a street that does not lead us anywhere is a street in which we do not want to spend a great deal of our valuable time.

There are lots of fine artists busy nowadays both in France and in England, and painting has already gone ahead to still newer discoveries. But this book cannot follow it, because here we are, at

THE END

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