

JULY, 1903.



NOTES ON THE PICTURES AT
BELVOIR CASTLE
BY LADY VICTORIA MANNERS
PART II.

VERY great interest attaches to the series of pictures of the *Seven Sacraments*, painted in 1636 for the Cavaliere de Pozzo by Nicholas Poussin. This set was purchased by the fourth Duke of Rutland, in 1786, from the Bonapaduli Palace in Rome, by the advice of Sir Joshua Reynolds, for £2,000. To evade the law forbidding works of art to pass out of the country, copies were substituted for the originals, as the following letters show:—

“James Byres to the Duke of Rutland, 1785,

June 10th, Rome. Some years ago you expressed a desire of having the *Seven Sacraments*, by Nicholas Poussin, in the Bonapadulia Palace. At that time it was impossible to get them, but I have just now unexpectedly succeeded. The price is two thousand pounds sterling. I get them one at a time from the Marquess, as the copies are made and put up in their places. I am in possession of four of them, and the fifth is now copying, but this is done with the greatest secrecy, and I must beg the favour of your Grace that if you take them, you will not mention it until they are in your possession; were it known that they were going out of Rome, they certainly would be stopped, as they were formerly when Sir Robert Walpole had purchased them, and should wish it



SEA PIECE BY W. VAN DE VELDE

were never known that they came through my hands, as it might bring me to some trouble here. If your Grace does not choose to have them, I beg you will mention nothing of this affair, and destroy this letter" (*Belvoir MSS.*, vol. iii., p. 214).

"Sir Joshua Reynolds to the Duke of Rutland, 1785, July 5th. In regard to the subject of Mr. Beyers' letter, I would by all means recommend your Grace to close with it; though two thousand pounds

is a great sum, a great object of art is procured by it, perhaps a greater than any we have at present in this nation. Poussin certainly ranks amongst the first of the first rank of painters, and to have such a set of pictures of such an artist will really and truly enrich this nation. I have not the least scruple about the sending copies for originals not only from the character of Beyers, but if that trick had been intended he would not have mentioned a word

about his having copies made. I don't wish to take them out of your Grace's hands, but I certainly would be glad to be the purchaser myself. I only mean that I recommend only what I would do myself; I really think they are very cheap" (*Belvoir MSS.*, vol. iii., p. 222).

When the set at length arrived safely in England, Sir Joshua was delighted with them; before being sent to Belvoir the pictures were exhibited for a time at the Royal Academy, where they were much admired. Horace Walpole, however, did not share

the general enthusiasm, as he declares in one of his letters that Sir Joshua's geese were swans! The work of relining and cleaning the pictures appears to have been personally superintended by Reynolds, and the details given in his letter as to the methods of picture cleaning in the eighteenth century may interest the readers of *THE CONNOISSEUR* to-day.

"Sir Joshua Reynolds to the Duke of Rutland, 1786, October 4th, London. Everything relating to

the pictures has hitherto turned out most prosperously. They have passed through the operations of lining and cleaning, all which has been performed in my own house under my own eye. I was strongly recommended to a Neopolitan as having an extraordinary secret for cleaning pictures, which though I declined listening to at first, I was at length persuaded to send for the man, and tried him by putting into his hands a couple of what I thought the most difficult

pictures to clean of any in my house. His success was so complete that I thought I might securely trust him with the *Sacraments*, taking care to be always present when he was at work. He possesses a liquid which he applies with a soft sponge only, and without any violence of friction takes off all the dirt and varnish without touching or in the least affecting the colours. With all my experience in picture cleaning, he really amazed me. The pictures are just now as they came from the easel. I may now safely congratulate your Grace on being



A LADY WITH ATTENDANT BY G. NETSCHER



THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI
BY MURILLO



VENUS NURSING CUPID
BY PARMIGIANO



VIRGIN AND CHILD BY CARLO DOLCI



BAPTISM BY NICOLAS POUSSIN



ORDINATION BY NICOLAS POUSSIN

relieved from all anxiety. We are safely landed ; all danger is over."

Another series of the *Seven Sacraments* purchased from the Duke of Orlean's collection in 1798 for £4,900 by the Duke of Bridgewater is now in the possession of Lord Ellesmere at Bridgewater House, and differs in many respects from the Belvoir pictures : the figures are larger, and the shadows darker and colder.

The picture in the Belvoir set, *John baptizing Christ*, was presented by George IV. to the fifth Duke of Rutland as a substitute for the *Sacrament of Penance*, which is supposed to have been burnt in the disastrous fire of 1816.

The collection unfortunately possesses few pictures by the Spanish masters ; there are, however, three Murillos. The two hanging in the Picture Gallery, *The Adoration of the Magi* and *The Madonna and Child with St. Anne*, have both suffered from over restoration and cleaning, the altar-piece in the Chapel, *The Holy Family in a Landscape*, is, however, of very great beauty, both as regards composition and

technique. The figures are about life size, the Virgin is of the calm and placid type beloved by Murillo and his followers, the little St. John stands before her with his cross and scroll and lamb, St. Joseph behind. The landscape is especially beautiful ; in the middle distance the spire of a church is dimly seen, and far away are solemn, mysterious mountains. The tone of the picture is dark, even sombre for Murillo, and is full of deep poetry and feeling. These three pictures were purchased by the fourth duke from Lord Harrington ; the exact sum paid is not stated, although it is mentioned that they were valued by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mr. Cipriani, R.A., and Mr. Cosway, R.A., at £1,800. Dr. Waagen remarks : "The picture in the Chapel I consider one of the finest by the master in all England. The expression of the heads has an elevation that Murillo seldom attained in such perfection ; that of the Infant Saviour is as if He were transfigured. At the same time, what is most rare, the execution is carried out in a warm, reddish tone with equal solidity in every part."



THE HOLY FAMILY BY MURILLO



THE BIRTH OF ERICHTONIUS

By Rubens

Belvoir Castle Collection

Height, 16½ ins. ; width, 20 ins.