

MURILLO (1618—1683).

PICTURE STUDY FOR SPRING TERM, 1935.

By E. C. ALLEN.

It is not often we find a painter who has brought two absolutely different styles to an equal perfection. But such is the case with the Spanish master, Murillo. Having studied the works of two great contemporaries, Van Dyck and Velasquez, he developed a style and method of his own, totally different from either, yet showing he had learnt from each. He had absorbed from Velasquez his close observation of nature, and the truth and realism which he followed so faithfully, and from Van Dyck a method of painting and a finish and polish which were unique. But his own work is not in the least like that of either of these great men. It is so entirely his own that it is comparatively easy to say 'That is a Murillo,' even when one is not an expert. He combines the dreamy poetry of Spain with the realism and matter-of-factness of the northern countries.

Religious idealism is the keynote of one-half of his work, and to this group belong his numerous pictures of the Virgin, and many illustrating incidents in the lives of the saints. He seems to want to paint the unseen world of angels and visions as being part of the world in which his saints lived. The clouds that support the Virgin are made of cherubs, and the haloes round his holy children are full of angels' wings.

This gives to his religious pictures a radiance and an un-earthliness that is very beautiful, and with it there is a sympathy and tenderness that forbids all thought of artificiality. The Holy Family was one of his favourite subjects, and he is the only artist who has painted the Vision of St. Francis, when the Christ on the Crucifix bent down to him, and embraced him with one arm. This marvellous picture is in Seville, and is associated in my mind with Burne Jones's 'Vision of a Knight.'

The other class or type of this artist's work is absolutely different. He brought the painting of the Spanish 'gamin,' or

street-boy, to a perfection never equalled either before or since. We northerners, who shiver through six months of cold weather, can hardly understand how the hot sun of Spain is clothes and food to her little 'wayside sparrows.' The children of the Ghetto, of the fountain, of the church-step and the market-stall, wear hardly any more drapery than is considered necessary for the Holy Child or the little St. John. Their limbs are dimpled, their curls shine, their eyes twinkle, they are absolutely contented in their dirt and poverty—which to them means freedom and merriment. Murillo makes his gamins 'slum angels,' and they are as delightful as those other angels of Paradise.

Seville is perhaps the best place to visit to see Murillo at his finest. Between 1670 and 1674 he painted in that city a series of pictures of Works of Mercy for the great hospital of La Caridad. Of these 'Moses Striking the Rock' is one of the largest, though not the most famous. We are fortunate in having for our term's study the whole of this and two details enlarged. A better title would be 'The Israelites enjoying the water from the Rock.' All the striking is over. Moses is giving thanks, and Aaron is amazed at the miracle. But there is no feeling of anything miraculous having happened among the Israelites. They wanted water, now they have got it, and that is the end of the matter for them. As quickly as possible they crowd up, bringing their various pots and jars, and leaving a space before their leader. The animals come too, and many children, bright-faced, sturdy little creatures who are delighted at all the bustle and excitement. The grouping is most natural, nothing forced or stiff about it. It falls into three or four little groups, of which I think I like best the one on the right. Don't you know how a thirsty child would put both hands on the bowl, and how the careful mother would keep a firm hold lest the little one drank too fast? And the elder child behind calls, 'Leave some for me.' In colour, how delightful too, would be the kneeling man's bare arm and pottery jug against the silver stream of the water! And how perfect is the child on the horse!

Water is very precious in Spain. It is drunk ceremoniously, when drunk at all, and is not the matter-of-course affair it is in England. We have another picture showing the preciousness of water in the little 'Christ and St. John' from Madrid. Contrary to the usual practice of artists, in this picture Murillo

makes the little Jesus wait on his cousin, that wild boy who 'grew strong, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.'

What a charming scene it is! Not in the least affected or strained. Two little boys, one giving the other a drink from a shell. Yet it is a perfect picture, full of peace and holiness. Notice the balance of light and shade, and the triangular form, and think of some of Raphael's groups. Would he not have enjoyed this if he could see it?

We have another picture from Madrid, the 'Holy Family.' In our reproduction it has suffered somewhat, being too strongly black and white, and losing the softness colour would give it. This must be three portraits, and excellent ones too. What a real boy that is, holding up, none too gently, the sparrow he has rescued from the dog. And yet, as we watch it, what a beautiful child it is, with those dark eyelashes and fair curls. How charmingly the whole idea of a peaceful family life is here expressed by all the quiet details of a home, the basket of sewing, the corner of the carpenter's bench, the stand for holding wool, and the funny little dog. Joseph's hand is full of beauty and character, so sensitive, and yet so strong, a craftsman's hand. It is a picture I am sure the children will love. We have only one of Murillo's other style, 'The Slum Angels,' but it is a very famous one, and nearer to us than Madrid or Seville.

These two little boys are sometimes called the Grape-eaters, and sometimes the Melon-eaters, which I think a better title, as both have melon, and only one grapes. Both are as ragged as can be, both well covered in another sense. Not a very satisfying meal, we think, as we look at this picture while the cold winds of March seem to go through us. But we are not Spaniards, the children of the sun. Really in colour, this is a study in soft browns and delicate pinks and yellows, with the melon for highest tone, and the sheen on the grapes and the boys' chests for half-tones. They are perfectly contented, and perfectly at ease. The Medici Society publish quite a good reproduction in colour, which would be worth while getting, as, although no larger than our monochromes, it would give the children an idea of Murillo's distinctive range of colour. (They call it the 'Melon-Eaters,' by the way.)

There are two beautiful pictures by this artist within easy reach of people near London. The little St. John and the Lamb in the National Gallery, and a very beautiful 'Assumption of the Virgin' in the Dulwich Gallery. I very much hope all who can will go to look at the latter. They will find many treasures besides that one, and it is a small gallery, therefore not too exhausting, and quite an easy place to get to.

With Murillo the golden age of Spanish Art came to an end, and it was nearly a hundred years later that Goya took the world by storm.

We take leave of him with regret, feeling his genius and charm have taken us a long way in the sunny courts of Spain; and he will have to be divided between our idealists, such as Raphael, and our realists, such as Velasquez, and will do honour to both groups.

Members may obtain sets of the pictures set for the term's work from the P.N.E.U. Office, 26 Victoria Street, S.W.1 (price 2/3, post free).

Excerpt from *Murillo, 1617-1682* by Rosemary Wilkinson, PR 65, 1954

substantiate the story concerning its origin. The Virgin and Child selected for study this term shows us Murillo at his best. It might be said to typify the universal and everlasting beauty of motherhood, a favourite subject with artists throughout the centuries. The Christian ideal has helped to elevate the mother and child theme, enduing it with a sense of mystery and wonder that has always appealed to the public imagination. It is of little consequence that Murillo's Mary is a statuesque Spanish beauty, or that the chubby Child nestling against his Mother's breast is a solemn dark-eyed Spanish baby. The young mother's lovely oval face bears an expression of serene contentment; her eyes are thoughtful as she ponders on many things in the manner of mothers everywhere. Her hands, long, slender and strong, clasp the Child tenderly. He looks a happy, placid babe, secure in His Mother's love. There is more colour here than in the artist's earlier works; the deep turquoise of the Madonna's stole contrasts with the rich cerise of her dress; about her shoulders is a fissure of thinner beige-coloured material. The light shines directly on the face of the Mother and on the Child. One can see what the critic meant who described Murillo's flesh tints as having been painted with blood and milk. The rocky background and trailing ivy is very similar to that in *The Dice Players*.

BARTOLOMÉ ESTÉBAN MURILLO,

1618—1682 *

By E. C. ALLEN.

The subject for our study this term is the great Spanish painter Murillo. A contemporary of the greatest of all Spanish masters, Velasquez, who recognized his talent and gave him advice which was gratefully appreciated, he was born in Seville, and baptized on New Year's Day, 1618. So though we count him as 1618, he was probably born a few days earlier. Of his early life and education we know very little, except that he worked under Juan del Castillo, an artist of little merit, until his meeting with Velasquez in 1643-4, when he was on a visit to Madrid. The great Court painter was very kind to him, and gave him opportunities to study the works of Titian and other Italian masters, as well as pictures by Van Dyck and Rubens in the Palace Galleries.

But Murillo was not a realist. He did not want to choose his subjects from the realistic school. The tenderness and grace of Raphael appealed more to his gentle nature than the faithfulness of Spaniards and Dutchmen. He was an idealist and a Romantic—sometimes, to our robust age, seeming sentimental in his treatment of his subjects. His palette was not as varied as that of Velasquez, and he was fond of sharp contrasts, often

* Picture Study for Summer Term.

distinctly dividing his canvas into a light and a dark half, after the manner of Giorgione. His flesh tints are brown, almost always, and his Madonnas keep close to the warm-hued beauties of Spain.

He had two distinct sets of subjects. Saints and Madonnas in ecstasy or adoration, treated with tenderness and beauty, such as 'The Vision of St. Francis,' 'St. Elizabeth of Hungary,' 'The Assumption,' or 'St. Anthony of Padua with the Child Christ,' all of them having angels or cherubs and an idealistic treatment, make the first series. The second set of subjects were entirely different. They were pictures of the street boys of Seville—not glorified or made holy, but just little and big children of the slums playing with such poor toys as they had, eating their fruit or crusts, half naked, dirty, but full of life and character and beauty. They have been called 'The Angels of the Slums.' They appeal to us to-day as much and more than they did to those who saw them nearly three hundred years ago.

Then, absolutely different in style and treatment to either of these subjects, there is his great historical picture of '*Moses striking the Rock*' for water for the Israelites. This picture shows the versatility of the artist, his imagination, and his power of composition. In many ways it is a blending together of the two different manners, and therefore I have chosen it as our first picture, or rather, our first two pictures, as we have an enlarged section. I hope teachers will try to provide lenses for the children, as there are many details in this large canvas that a glass brings to light. The intricacies of the right-hand corner, the expression on the children's faces, the ecstasy of Moses, the solemn awe of Aaron are all interesting. The children will love all the animals, especially the comic woolly-headed dromedary. The dark rock dividing the picture is very like Giorgione, but the child on the horse is pure Murillo, straight from the doorstep of some Seville street. Spaniards, perhaps more than any other European nation, understand and appreciate the value of water, and know how precious it is and how to keep it clean and cool. Look at the lovely water-pot slung on the horse and the quaint shape of the one the man tilts to pour into the child's uplifted pot. What a collection of shapes there

are, some metal, some earthenware. There are many fine faces in the crowd, and no doubt much brilliant colour. Let us hope the original has safely survived the horrors of war.

I believe the best collection of Murillo's works in this country is in the Dulwich Art Gallery, but of course no one can see them until the war is over. So all our pictures are from continental galleries. Of these, perhaps the Louvre will be the most accessible to most people, so we might take next the '*Madonna of Seville*.' The treatment here is most characteristic of the artist's devotional and poetic manner. Again there is the sharp contrast of light and shadow. The clouds are full of little angels, and the Holy Dove descends from the hand of God the Father. St. Elizabeth, certainly 'stricken in years,' has a fine old face, full of dignity and intelligence. The little St. John gives the cross of twigs he has made, and his scroll bears the words, 'Ecce Agnus Dei.' He is quite a different type from the tiny Jesus, who looks so thoughtfully at the toy he has been given. Imagine all the lovely greens and bronzes, shades of umber and crimson, and the delicate sunset lights in the sky. The vividness reflected in the water and the whiteness of the lamb stand out even more than the glow on the body of the Holy Child. It is a picture that becomes more and more engrossing as one studies it.

'*The Grape Eaters*.' Here is a picture that will, I am afraid, arouse a spark of envy in our fruit-less war-time children! A whole meal of fruit! Grapes, melon, bananas all at once, and all for two ragged little boys! What a feast! Here they sit, in a shady corner of an old stone wall, well-fed, warm, perfectly content. Dirty, probably, but not thin or unhappy. The ragged shirt of the one so cleverly picking off his grapes with his teeth is a slight protection to his back, but that is all. Look at the bulge in the cheek of the melon-eater as he holds a bit there while he watches the other. He is rather fat, really, but his lower garment—a pair of knee-breeches through which his knees and shirt protrude—is as well ventilated as that of his friend. How straight and well shaped their feet are, and how beautiful the foreshortening of the boys' chin and throat. It is a charming study of street life such as Murillo loved to paint.

The next picture, '*The Holy Family*,' has nothing devotional nor scriptural about it. It is just a father and mother enjoying their little son as he plays with his dog—a delightful picture, full of incident and colour. The child seems to hold in his hand what I am very much afraid is a bird, as if he had taken it from the dog. The mother winds a ball of wool off that zig-zaggy thing which holds the skein—it revolves as she winds. Velasquez has the same in his great picture 'The Tapestry Weavers,' so I suppose they are common in Spain. I think that is a corner of a carpenter's bench on the right, with a tool on it, and that is a leather apron across the father's knees. The confident manner in which the child leans on his father is very delightful. The whole atmosphere of the picture is peaceful and home-like. Notice the man's hands, and then turn back and look at all the beautiful hands in the Moses picture. I am afraid I cannot tell you anything about the cowl thing on the floor, but I think it is a shade to put over a candle or small lamp.

Now we have only '*The Infant Christ and St. John*' left. Two chubby children playing near a pool. Jesus has scooped up a shellful of water which he holds for John to drink. This time the little wooden cross is bigger, and the 'Ecce Agnus Dei' quite distinct if you have a good print. The clouds are full of dear little adoring angels, and the light is gentle and diffused. The expressions of the children are natural and unconscious, and the gesture Jesus makes with his left hand is just an ordinary 'Here, take it,' not drawing attention to the onlookers in the clouds.

I hope the children will enjoy the calm beauty of these pictures, coming like something from another world into the sadness and turmoil of to-day. It does not do to turn our backs on our troubles, but how grateful we all are for the peace and beauty that comes to us now and then from the work of these great men of long ago, who had the power to see the loveliness of mankind and the skill to hand it down to us as this great artist has done.