

## SIX VELASQUEZ PICTURES.

By E. C. ALLEN.

(*Picture Study for the Autumn Term*).

VELASQUEZ was a Spaniard, and after studying in Italy, he was appointed court painter to Phillip II., in Madrid. Previous to his appointment, he had done several wonderfully fine landscapes and subject pictures, but his marvellous portrait of one of the court beauties attracted the attention of Philip, who with his usual acquisitiveness, more or less forbade the painter to leave the court again. His love of natural beauty had to be expressed in the studies he made of the royal children, the only brightness there was in that gloomy palace.

Perhaps he is the finest character painter that has ever lived—yet it is difficult to say that, because at once Rembrandt and Van Dyke claim our attention. Still, when we look at the pictures for this term's work, it is difficult to imagine anyone could do better. "The Young Philip IV." would be a characteristic one to begin with. Though fair, there is a strong likeness to the present King of Spain—the same long chin and lower lip, and high forehead. The rich brocade suit with damask sleeves is most carefully painted. Technically, I believe the painting of the gloves is considered the finest bit of work we have, and the balance of dark and light tones is quite exquisite.

The children will doubtless prefer the little "Don Carlos." Such a quaint mixture of baby and prince. Still in the petticoat age, yet wearing a sword, and one suspects the baton he holds in the right hand is necessary to keep him on his feet. The picture is very soft and delicate in tone and treatment. The dark crimson curtain makes a rich background for the child's elaborate dress. Notice the arrangement of light—the high points being the face and hands, and the tassel and feather subdued and secondary. It is the same little Don Carlos we see again on a horse, and in many other pictures.

But I think the painter must often have wearied of the formality of court life, and the stiffness of court clothes, rich and beautiful as they were. "The Forge of Vulcan" was an

attempt to break away, although it necessitated the painting of a stout Doña as Iris, the messenger of Venus. Here Velasquez has translated the sturdy men of Madrid to the land of the great gods, but in doing so, has changed them not one iota. The lame son of Zeus is a surprised, almost, I think, a disgusted, blacksmith, at the sudden appearance of the goddess who lays her emphatic commands on him. And the four assistants take the visitor in much the same way as a smithy hand would take the visit of royalty to-day. There is a distinction about these four men that is given by hard work. The beautiful development of their bodies expresses the independence and uprightness of their minds. They are conquerors. Theirs is not the slow laborious conquests of an ungenerous soil, such as bows the backs and saps the energies of Millet's patient peasants. It is the triumphant conquest of a worthy foe, achieved with the help of generous clean-souled fire, and by a daily fight that gives a strength and skill which raises the possessors above their fellows. How splendid is the man with his back to us, from the top of his thick curls to the sole of his beautifully arched foot! What a sense of arrested power—the power to cut a hair's breadth if required,—is held by the bending figure to the right, with his beautiful poise and weight thrown back. There is boldness even in the frank curiosity, not wonder, in the young man with the callow beard, a lower type, but much younger. And the one in the background in charge of the bellows, the philosophy of struggle has bitten deep into his soul. The children will not feel all this at first; they will be amused by this buxom Iris, and interested in the familiar paraphernalia scattered about the forge; armour, hammers, pincers, etc., the three men hammering alternately as men do to-day, and the homely details of jug and chains. Notice the lameness of Vulcan is shown in his shoulders, not his feet. They are not shown at all. I think Rembrandt might have given him a grotesqueness of body that is here entirely absent. The self-contained Spaniard avoided eccentricities. His search was for beauty and power. So we have only the strength of Vulcan, not his deformity.

"The Surrender of Breda" is sometimes called "The Lances." It commemorates one of Philip's empty successes in the Netherlands.

But what a wonderful picture it is! How daring to fill almost a quarter of the canvas with those dark perpendicular

lines—and there are more and still more of them stretching into the distance. The mighty hosts of Spain assembled to show it is no dishonour to a brave town to surrender to such an overwhelming force. How full of true chivalry is the gesture of the Spanish commander as he lays his hand on the defender's shoulder, ignoring the key that is held out to him! There is a great deal to study in this picture, a great deal for the children to talk about.

I think the time in our "picture talk" lessons when the children learn the most is after the children have given their formal description from memory, after the teacher has finished what explanation is necessary, and they settle down to discuss it, to look and to wonder and to feel. Then the true training in taste and observation begins. Then they unconsciously learn how much more worth while are the pictures of the great ones than the less, and also to distinguish which are the great ones and which the less. Let them linger on the details here as well as on the whole. The head and hand of the man with the musket; the pose of the boy with the dog; the movement of the horse which adds so much to the feeling of the scene being a moment in a moving drama, not a complete episode; as well as all the balance and perfect symmetry that keeps the great canvas an orderly whole.

I should take "The Tapestry Weavers" next. It will be such a startling contrast. How wonderful it is in its details, and what an insight this and the "Forge of Vulcan" give us into the everyday life of the town outside the ken of courtiers. One can imagine the painter, his great soul wearied with the petty tyrannies of that cramped, suspicious court life, wandering about the city, and finding rest for both his eyes and his mind in such a scene as this.

There seem to be three distinct groups or ideas in the picture; the two girls on the right, one winding wool on a most practical frame, and the other dumping down her basket of linen as if she thought it heavy, is the first. How perfect it is! Some of Velasquez' wonderful flesh painting is shown here, in the gleaming white of the girl's neck and arm, and the modelling of her foot. What a graceful gesture that is with her hand, and how the dark bracelet sets off the daintiness of her wrist.

The second group is on the left, where the older woman with wheel and distaff speaks over her shoulder to the rather clumsy

person who is trying to fasten back the heavy curtain that the workers may have more light. I cannot quite see if she checks the wheel with her other hand or not. The wheel seems to be moving, but the pose of the shoulders would bring the hand just about to the centre support.

Scattered on the floor are the balls of wool and scraps of material that break up the foreground and add light and colour to the picture. Then there is still a whole world of possibility in the exquisite scene at the back. Some ladies have come in to see the finished work. What a beautiful back that is turned to us, the carriage of the head and turn of the neck full of grace and dignity. I sometimes wonder if we remember nowadays that grace of dignity, or is it sometimes sacrificed to "freedom"? The little miss who looks over her shoulder at the working girls is dignified too, and wears her high comb as a crown on her well carried head. Mars and Venus and attendant cupids seems to be the subject of the tapestry and a beautiful shaft of sunlight lights up the picture.

Now we have only "Christ in the House of Martha," but I think it is one of my favourites. Everytime I see something fresh to wonder at. Such a sulky Martha—of course she is glad to serve the Master—but is it fair that Mary should leave it all to her? A strong peasant face, with wonderful modelling of cheek and chin.

The gentle old woman behind her preaches patience—but when did the young ever welcome that doctrine?

Through the open window frame we see the Master and Mary, and what I think is the old woman, returned to her guest. Not at all a conventional Christ—He rests and talks with His friends. The utter simplicity of the picture is one of its great charms. No attempt to glorify the cottage home. Simple preparations for a simple meal. The chair on which Jesus is seated might be seen in any cottage to-day. The wrinkled peaceful face of the old woman is very arresting, full of the wisdom and philosophy of the poor.

It is a good thing we have in London so many of the Velasquez pictures this term, so that some of the children will see the originals. Let them see Philip grown old as well, and little Don Carlos on his horse, and the Infanta with her pink bows. I wonder if they will feel as I do that we learn to know the sitters but never the artist?