

## RAPHAEL.\*

BY EDITH FROST.

*"Raphael of Urbino—an example of the prodigal gifts of Nature, fair in body, fairer in mind, charming in manner, admirable in art, unwearied in labour, eternal in glory."*—  
JOACHIM SANDRART.

Raphael Sanzio was born on the 6th of April, 1483, in the Umbrian town of Urbino. His father, Giovanni Sanzio, was a poet and a painter of some merit, so that from the first Raphael was surrounded by an atmosphere of art and beauty, and from his very earliest years he would have been accustomed to handle the brushes and play with the colours of the artist.

Urbino is a pleasant town in the Apennine Hills, and there the boy would naturally and unconsciously have been influenced by the wide spaces, clear skies, and glorious openness of the hill side. He loved the green earth, and, as to all her lovers Nature gives a most wonderful, bounteous and overflowing return of joy, so something of her patience, her trust and peacefulness in the midst of manifold activities, seems to have crept into his heart and grown there with his growth. For although Raphael worked so hard and industriously at painting and other branches of his art, such as architecture and sculpture, that at the age of thirty-seven he died, worn out with excess of work, yet never in anything that he did is there the least suggestion of such feverish activity. On the contrary, there is so great a sense of peace, breadth and heavenly repose, that we turn to him for rest and refreshment, for restoration of mental balance, for a confident reassurance of the right ordering of all things in times that seem so full of stress and affliction. We, who have the guidance of some of the ways of the children to-day, would do well to read and ponder over the life of Raphael—imagining its early awakening, seeing what he was, what he did, and the manner of his doing. He seems to have been a most charming and attractive person, loveable and loving, full of friendliness, gentleness and courtesy, but withal strong and resolute. He was humble, simple, modest, ready to acknowledge ignorance, jealous of none, generous in his praise of others, and joyful with

\*To illustrate the work of the term (the study of reproductions of six pictures) in the Parents' Union School.

the deep joy born of the knowledge of grief and pain, and of the exigencies of labour, but a knowledge ordered and rightly placed by a great sense of proportion and a perfect trust in the divine ruling of the world.

At the age of eleven Raphael lost his father and from that time his uncle became his guardian. Some most charming and graceful letters written to this uncle are still existing. "Dearest in the place of a father, . . . I always have you in my heart, and when I hear your name I feel as if I heard that of my father." This uncle apprenticed him to Timoteo Viti, the best painter in Urbino at that time, and in his workshop Raphael remained until 1500 and while there, among other works, he painted "The Vision of the Knight" when he was about sixteen years old. In 1500 he left Urbino and went to Perugia, there working for a time under Perugino and staying until 1504, when at the age of twenty-one he set out for Florence with high hopes and the desire to attain perfection in the city where all the best painters, including Perugino, were then at work. During this time, probably in the year 1505, he painted the "St. George and the Dragon" that is now in the Louvre. In 1508, when he had learnt all that Florence could teach him, came a great step forward for the artist. He was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius II., and from that time for twelve years, until his death, he laboured ardently and passionately at a multitude of occupations far beyond the strength of one man. The Pope, wishing to see all his rooms decorated with fresco paintings, called upon the best painters to work for him. In one of the rooms of the Vatican Raphael painted the "Deliverance of St. Peter from Prison," probably in 1512 or 1513, and in another the "Incendio del Borgo," from which picture we have the Water-Carriers to study this term.

But though working continually for the Pope Raphael found time for subjects of his own, and during this period he painted what is generally considered to be his finest work, "The Madonna di San Sisto." And again at the same time, or a little later, he designed the ten famous cartoons, one of which is "The Miraculous Draught of Fishes."

Raphael died on his thirty-seventh birthday. "On the night of Good Friday, that most gentle and excellent of painters, Raphael of Urbino, died, to the infinite grief of all men, but especially of the learned, . . . now this glorious work is interrupted by the hand of envious death, who has robbed us

of this youthful master at the age of thirty-four, (*sic*) on his own birthday. . . . And indeed, a most rare and excellent master has passed away, and every gentle soul must grieve to think that he is gone. His body has been honourably buried in the Rotunda, and his spirit is doubtless gone to gaze on those heavenly mansions where there can be no decay." (Marc Antonio Michieli to his friends).

*"Duty and Pleasure" or "The Vision of a Knight."*

The knight, on the very threshold of life, young and strong, sleeps and dreams, resting on his shield beneath a laurel tree. He is armed and apparently ready for the battle and adventures that will come, but before the heat and turmoil of the day, in the quiet and peaceful time of the dawn, comes the vision of the choice to be made before he sets out upon the way. At his head stands a dignified female figure representing Duty. With steady, purposeful gaze bent on the sleeping youth, she offers him a sword to be the trusty weapon of his right hand and a book wherein he may learn what are the real and lasting things, the ideals and aspirations of the true knight, in defence of which only may that sword be wielded. She wears a yellow tunic covered with a simple robe of rich but sombre purple. Behind her is a hill with its steep and winding path, crowned by a Church.

A figure of a maiden representing Pleasure also gazes at the knight, but because her beauty is of a weaker and more transient nature, her look is not so compelling as that of Duty. In accordance with her name she is gaily dressed in a tunic of cherry red draped over a blue robe. In her hair are flowers, and, twisted round her neck and body strings of coral beads. There is an attraction of pleasant light and colour about her. All she offers is myrtle in full bloom, but that is love, with all the present joys of ease and pleasant ways. Behind her in the well-watered valley is a promise of pleasure in the fair city or in ways of easy dalliance, in shady paths by softly flowing streams.

But note that the place where the knight lies is hard and stony—he has not chosen as yet to rest in luxury, while around him is the freshness and over him the clear, pure sky of early morning.

*St. George and the Dragon.*

The maiden flies to the hill for safety, there to pray for help. In Raphael's other picture of St. George we see her on her

knees. The Knight stays in the sombre valley to fight and slay the dragon and to save himself and her. In the midst of the gloom and darkness his white horse, a symbol of the purity that upholds him, shines bright and clear, and against the whiteness it is very good to look at the warm red of his saddle.

But the dragon is not yet slain, only goaded into desperation and fury by the wounds already inflicted and by that broken lance-head in his breast. The hateful, loathsome, crawling thing is very near, very poisonous, but the horse and rider are unsullied by it, they neither shrink nor turn to fly; St. George, with uplifted sword, will not deign to strike blindly; with steady, concentrated gaze he looks undaunted at the foe and gathers all his strength into one final and decisive blow.

Then the valley will be free from its pest, the dark cloud will pass away, the sun that shines brightly over the distant landscape will again bathe the whole land in a glory of light. And St. George on his white horse will ride away in quest of further noble deeds, into the hill country with its varying way, its mountain tops of light and its deep dark valleys, where dragons live, through which every true knight must pass undaunted ere he prove himself a tried and faithful warrior.

*The Madonna di San Sisto.*

Of the Madonnas of Raphael, Vasari wrote: "They display all that the highest idea of beauty could imagine in the representation of a youthful virgin: modesty in her eyes, on her forehead honour, in the line of the nose grace, in the mouth virtue."

On the clouds, half-way between heaven and earth and surrounded by a glory of countless cherub-heads, stands the Madonna with her child. The red of her dress and the blue of her flowing draperies are bright in the clear cool light. Rather below her, nearer the earth but not of it, are the Saints kneeling in adoration. Saint Sixtus, still wearing his pontifical robes with his tiara beside him, points to his people below and intercedes for them, while Saint Barbara looks down upon them with a face full of love and tenderness. Leaning on a balustrade are two child angels, the messengers between earth and heaven; they gaze upwards with rapt attention and an expression of happy content. But the saints and angels are minor incidents, the whole interest and beauty of the picture centre round the Mother and her Child. Together they gaze out and over the



world of people, supremely conscious of it, as needs must be, but content and happy with the heavenly joy and peace of those who behold eternity. In the dark radiant eyes of the Mother there is a quality and depth that suggest a questioning wonder of what will come, tempered now with gladness in the possession of the heavenly Child in her arms. The Babe for the time is secure in His mother's love, but His wide-open, wistful eyes reveal a consciousness and understanding beyond that of other children; with a rapt and serious look He seems to share her meditation. They are both lost in a contemplation of the thoughts and actions of all time. Fully conscious of eternity, they see the ideals, aspirations and hopes of men, the temptations, strivings and struggles—even the failures—in their due proportion, not as man sees them, looming large and filling the world, but each in its appointed place in the working out of God's plan. Their peaceful, happy confidence cannot be disturbed by the turmoil, the victories and defeats of the world; from the midst of a heavenly calm they make an irresistible appeal to mankind.

#### *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes.*

This cartoon, which may be seen in the South Kensington Museum, was originally one of a set of ten, illustrating the Acts of the Apostles, which Raphael designed for tapestries to adorn the walls of the Sistine Chapel. Rubens found seven of them in Brussels cut into perpendicular strips. He advised Charles I. to buy them and so they came to England, remaining in pieces until William III had them repaired.

The colours have been seemingly disturbed, for Christ's robe, which is white with brown shadows, is reflected pink in the water—obviously it was originally of a reddish tone.

This picture illustrates the account of the miraculous draught of fishes as told by St. Luke, chapter V, verses 1-11. The whole, except for one figure, is a scene of animation, vigour and life. The hungry birds fly hither and thither in search of food, the gulls skim lightly over the water also seeking daily bread, the people flock from the town to the shore, the moving crowds wait impatiently there, looking if they may find bread of another kind—even the bread of life; the disciples, sons of Zebedee, struggle with the straining net so full of fishes, Peter, the impetuous, carried away by the event of the moment, throws himself on his knees: all in their stress and

eagerness turn towards the Giver of all bread, the perfectly peaceful, reposeful figure sitting in the stern of a sinking boat, giving them their meat in due season, quelling the storms in their hearts, showing no anxiety, no sense of rush or restlessness, diffusing an atmosphere of great calm which will bring peace and a promise of blessing to the hearts of all the disciples.

And Nature at the moment reflects unerringly the mind of the Creator of all things. The sky is of a smoothness that betokens a quiet air, the placid waters of the lake, the tiny ripples of the little waves, the trees and the flowers, seem to echo that phrase used of another occasion: "there was a great calm."

#### *The Liberation of St. Peter.*

The deliverance of St. Peter from prison is told by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter xii. "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him." Raphael shows us how the mighty power of Rome was as nothing before the power of God Almighty exerted in answer to the prayers of His faithful servants. "Herod and his armies fade away into the darkness of night, and a heavenly glory hovers over Peter and the little company gathered together in prayer for him."

This picture is divided into three scenes. In the first St. Peter, in a dungeon, sleeps as deeply and peacefully as a little child. Although he is so securely chained to the soldiers that his least movement must awaken them, yet, with a wonderful assurance and confidence, he heeds them not but trusts in God—his chained hands are folded together as though his last act had been one of prayer. His guards also sleep at their post, their painful rest forming a great contrast with that of the Saint. The small dreary cell is glorified and beautiful, full of a bright celestial light. If in his dreams St. Peter sees the heavenly visitor, it would seem to be but one of the guardian angels that he knows to be always there, though invisible. But, being roused by the angel, he sees him with his waking eyes and suffers himself to be led, dazed and wondering, down the steps past more sleeping soldiers into the outer world once more. "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together and were praying."

Then one of the guard, awaking, sees the empty cell; he hurries out and gives the alarm; it is still night, the moonlight

struggles with the flaring red light of his torch, which is reflected on the armour of the startled and bewildered soldiers who are unable to realize such an extraordinary happening as the disappearance of a prisoner through closed doors. But the man with the torch has grasped the full meaning of this event for himself and those others, and with energy and conviction he explains that they must search and find Peter, for Rome decrees that the soldier who fails at his post must not live.

*Group bringing Water.*

During the pontifical reign of Leo IV a large quarter of Rome, called the Borgo Vecchio, was consumed by fire. This fire approached and threatened to destroy St. Peter's Church, but the Pope; by his prayers, arrested the flames and saved the rest of the city.

The water-carriers occupy a space on the extreme right of the picture. Their figures are full of grace and motion; one eagerly and anxiously looks back to see that a continual supply of water is forthcoming. The wind which fanned the flames is still blowing strongly as may be seen, especially in the flowing draperies of the blue dress of the woman descending the steps. They are vigorous, dignified figures, swift in motion but without undue haste, anxious—evidently—but now placing the greatest faith in the blessing of the Pope and his prayer that the wind may be stayed and their efforts rewarded.