

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Great Artists, Vol 1., by Jennie Ellis Keysor

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

Title: Great Artists, Vol 1.
Raphael, Rubens, Murillo, and Durer

Author: Jennie Ellis Keysor

Release Date: September 10, 2007 [EBook #22564]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GREAT ARTISTS, VOL 1. ***

Produced by Stephen Hope, Jacqueline Jeremy and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

“Art manifests whatever is most exalted, and it manifests it to all.”—TAINE

GREAT ARTISTS

RAPHAEL RUBENS
MURILLO DURER

BY

JENNIE ELLIS KEYSOR

Author of “Sketches of American Authors”

EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING COMPANY

BOSTON

NEW YORK CHICAGO SAN FRANCISCO

COPYRIGHTED
BY EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING COMPANY,
1899.



A WORD TO THE TEACHER.

[3]

The following brief sketches are presented in fear and in hope—in fear lest they prove in no wise adequate for so glorious a subject; in the hope that they may encourage not only the pupil, but the teacher, to study the lives and the works of the great artists and to make every possible effort to have copies of masterpieces ever before them to study and to love.

The field of art study is a wonderful one from which to draw for language work. A double purpose is thus served. Interesting subjects are secured and pupils are given a start in acquiring a knowledge of the beautiful that fortifies them for the sorrows and cares of life; and, what is even better, prevents their own life from being commonplace.

Would the teacher wish to study further, a list of valuable reference books is appended to

each sketch, any one of which will greatly assist in acquiring a more extended knowledge of the subject.

In the study of an artist, take care to have a liberal supply of reproductions of his pictures at hand. These may be photographs, half-tones, like the illustrations in this book, or engravings. Good work cannot be done without such pictures.

Above all, work to cultivate a love for good pictures, not to fill young minds with uninspiring facts.

[Back to title page](#)

J. E. K.



SISTINE MADONNA.

[4]

RAPHAEL SANTI

[5]

“THE PERFECT ARTIST, THE PERFECT MAN.”

We are about to study Raphael, the most generally praised, the most beautiful, and certainly the most loved of all the painters of the world. When all these delightful things can be truthfully said of one man, surely we may look forward with pleasure to a detailed study of his life and works.

Often in examining the lives of great men we are compelled to pass over some events which, to say the least, are not creditable. Of Raphael this was not true. He was gifted with all admirable qualities, and so many-sided was his genius that, while we think of him first as a painter, we must not forget that he also carved statues, wrote poems, played musical instruments, and planned great buildings.

So much was he endeared to his pupils that, after he grew to be famous, he never went on the streets unless he was followed by an admiring throng of these students, ever ready to do his bidding or to defend his art from any possible attack by malicious critics. He lived at a time when artists were fiercely jealous of each other, and yet wherever he went harmony, like a good angel, walked unseen beside him, making whatever assembly he entered the abode of peace and goodwill. It is a beautiful thing that such a strong, lovable man should have had for his name that of the chief of the archangels, Raphael, a name beautiful of sound and ever suggestive of beauty and loveliness.

[6]

There seemed to have been special preparation for the birth of this unique character. Not only were his parents of the ideal sort, loving the best things of life and thinking ever of how best to rear the little son that God had given them, but the very country into which he was born was fitted to still further develop his natural tenderness and sweetness of disposition.

Webmo, the birthplace of Raphael, is a secluded mountain town on a cliff on the east slope of the Apennines directly east of Florence. It is in the division known as Umbria, a section noted for its gently broken landscape, such as in later years the artist loved to paint as background for his most beautiful Madonnas. Here the people were shut off from much of the excitement known to commercial towns. They were slower to take up new things than the people in the coast cities where men live by the exchange of goods and, incidentally, of customs. The inhabitants led simple, religious lives. We must remember, too, that hardly fifty miles away was the village of Assisi, where Saint Francis, the purest of men, had lived and labored and where, after his death, a double church had been built to his memory.

[7]

To this day there is a spirit of reverence that inspires the visitor to this region. No wonder that, in Raphael's time when this spirit was fresh and strong, it gave a character of piety and sweetness to the works of all the painters of Umbria. From these two causes, the secluded position of the region and the influence of Saint Francis, arose what is called the Umbrian school of painting. All painters belonging to this school made pictures very beautiful and full of fine religious feeling.

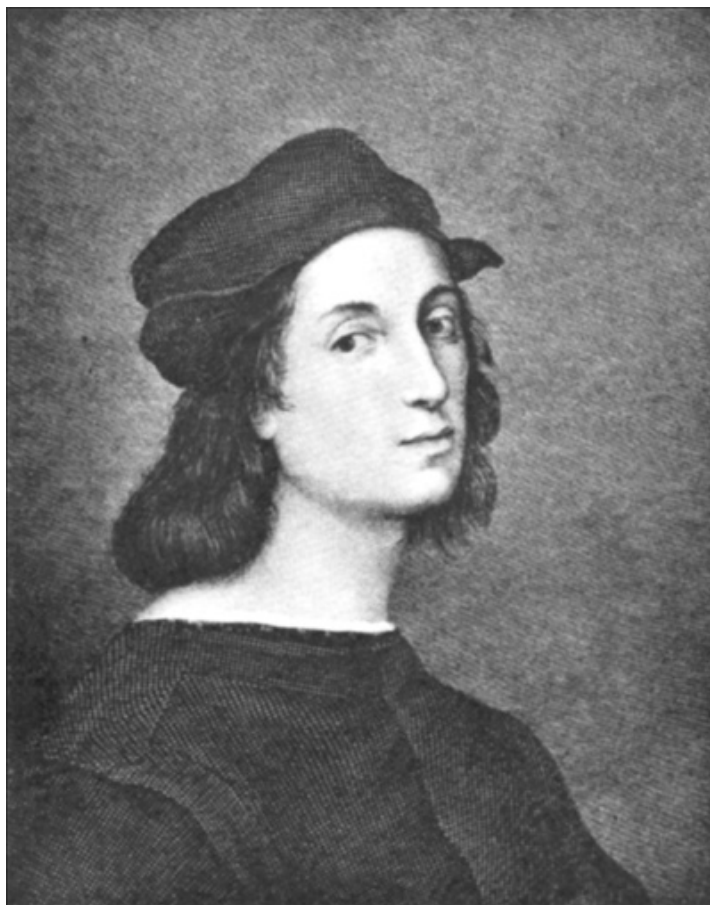
One April morning in 1483, to the home of Giovanni Santi, the painter, and his wife Magia, a dear little boy came, as millions of boys and girls have since come, to cheer and to bless. The

father and mother were very proud of their little son, and feeling perhaps that a more than ordinary child had been given them, they gave him the name of Raphael, as one of good omen.

If we were to visit, in Urbino, the house where Raphael was born, we would be shown a faded fresco of a Madonna and Child painted by Giovanni and said to be Magia and the child Raphael. [8]

From the earliest years the child was carefully tended. When he was only eight, the fond mother died and left the father to care for his boy alone. In due time a step-mother was brought home. She was a kind woman and loved and cared for the beautiful lad as if he were really her own child. Later when the father died, leaving the boy Raphael and his little half-sister, no one could have been more solicitous for the boy's rights than his step-mother. She and his uncle together managed his affairs most wisely.

We have no record that, like Titian, the boy Raphael used the juice of flowers with which to paint pictures of his childish fancies, but we do know that very early he became greatly interested in his father's studio and went in regularly to assist. Now, it must be remembered that, at this time, when a boy, wishing to learn to paint, went to the studio of a master he did not at once begin to use colors, brushes, and canvas. Instead, he usually served a long apprenticeship, sweeping out the studio, cleaning the brushes, grinding colors, and performing other common duties. Raphael's assistance to his father must have been largely of this humble sort. We can imagine, however, that his fond father did not make his hours long, and that there were pleasant ramblings in the woods nearby, and that many a bunch of flowers was gathered for the mother at home. There were happy hours, too, when the father and his son read together great books of poetry in which tales of love and knightly encounters were interesting parts. And then, I am sure, there were other happy hours when, tuning their instruments together, they filled the time with music's sweetest discourse. [9]



[10]

RAPHAEL.

This was indeed a happy childhood, a fit beginning for an ideal life. Meanwhile the boy grew strong, and his beauty, too, increased. The dark hair lay lightly upon his shoulders, and a certain dreaminess in his eyes deepened,—he was about to feel a great sorrow, for the father, so devoted, so exemplary, died when his boy was but eleven years old. We cannot help wishing that he might have lived to see at least one great picture painted by his son. We can easily imagine his smile of joy “at the first stroke that surpassed what he could do.”

[11]

Just what to do with the boy on the death of his father was an important matter for the step-mother and uncle to decide. They showed wisdom by their decision. Now, the greatest of all the Umbrian painters, before Raphael, was a queer little miserly man named Perugino, who at that time had a studio in Perugia, an Umbrian town not far distant from Urbino. Although he was of mean appearance and ignoble character, he had an unmistakable power in painting mild-eyed Madonnas and spotless saints against delicate landscape backgrounds. People disliked the man, but they could not help seeing the beauty of his art, and so his studio was crowded. Hither was sent the boy Raphael and when Perugino noted the lad and some of his work, he said, “Let him be my pupil: he will soon become my master.” As nearly as we can learn, he remained in this studio nine years, from 1495 to 1504.

[12]

Perugino’s style of painting greatly pleased Raphael. He was naturally teachable and this, with his admiration for Perugino’s pictures, made his first work in the studio very much like his master’s. Indeed it is almost impossible to tell some of his earliest pictures from those of his teacher. Let me tell you about one. It is called “*The Marriage of the Virgin*” and you would have to go to the Brera gallery in Milan to see it.

The legend runs thus: The beautiful Mary had many lovers all wishing to marry her. Now here was a difficulty indeed, and so the suitors were required to put by their rough staves for a night. The promise was that in the morning one would be in blossom, and its owner should have Mary for his wife. We can imagine that these lovers were anxious for day to dawn, and that all but one was sad indeed at the result. In the morning there were the rods, all save one, brown and rough and bare, but that one lay there alive with delicate buds and flowers, and all the air was full of fragrance. This was Joseph’s, and he went away glad and brought his young bride. This first great picture of Raphael’s represented this marriage taking place at the foot of the Temple steps. The disappointed lovers are present and, I am sorry to say, one of them is showing his anger by breaking his barren rod even while the marriage is taking place.

[13]

The first and the last work of a great man are always interesting, and that is why I have told you so much about this picture. You will be still more interested in Raphael’s last picture, “*The Transfiguration*.”

While in the studio he made many friends. With one he went to Siena to assist him in some fresco painting he had to do there. Of course you know that fresco is painting on wet plaster so that the colors dry in with the mortar.

The conversation of the studio was often of art and artists, and so the beautiful city of Florence must often have been an engaging subject. Think of what Florence was at this time, and how an artist must have thrilled at its very name! Beautiful as a flower, with her marble palaces, her fine churches, her lily-like bell-tower! What a charm was added when within her walls Leonardo da Vinci was painting, Michael Angelo carving, Savonarola preaching. In the early years of Raphael’s apprenticeship, the voice of the preacher had been silenced, but still, “with the ineffable left hand,” Da Vinci painted, and still the marble chips dropped from Angelo’s chisel as a *David* grew to majesty beneath his touch.

[14]

To Raphael, with his love of the beautiful, with his zeal to learn, Florence was the city of all others that he longed to see. At last his dream was to be realized. A noble woman of Urbino

gave him a letter to the Governor of Florence, expressing the wish that the young artist might be allowed to see all the art treasures of the city. The first day of the year 1505 greeted Raphael in Florence, the art center of Italy. We can only guess at his joy in seeing the works here and in greeting his fellow artists.

Angelo and Da Vinci had just finished their cartoons for the town hall, "*The Bathing Soldiers*," and "*The Battle of the Standard*," and they were on exhibition. All Florence was studying them, and of this throng we may be sure Raphael was an enthusiastic member. While here he painted several pictures. Among them was the "*Granduca Madonna*," the simplest of all his Madonnas—just a lovely young mother holding her babe. It is still in Florence, and to this day people look at it and say the Grand Duke, who would go nowhere without this gem of pictures, knew what was beautiful.

[15]



RAPHAEL IN HIS STUDIO.

Raphael did not stay long in Florence at this time, but soon returned to Perugia. His next visit to Florence was of greater length. During these years, 1506 to 1508, he painted many of his best known pictures. In studying the works of Raphael you must never tire of the beautiful Madonna, for it is said that he painted a hundred of these, so much did he love the subject and so successful was he in representing the child Jesus and the lovely mother. Some of his finest Madonnas belong to this time. Let us look at a few of them.

One, called "*The Madonna of the Goldfinch*," shows Mary seated with the Child Jesus at her knee and the young John presenting him with a finch, which he [caresses](#) gently. The Madonna has the drooping eyes, the exquisitely rounded face that always charm us, and the boys are real live children ready for a frolic. Another, called "*The Madonna of the Meadow*," represents the Virgin in the foreground of a gently broken landscape with the two children playing beside her. We must not forget, either, as belonging to this time, the very beautiful "*La Belle Jardiniere*," or the "*Madonna of the Garden*" which now hangs in the Louvre, the art gallery of Paris.

[16]

Like all his great Madonnas, the Virgin and Children are of surpassing loveliness. It is finished in such a soft, melting style that to see it in its exquisite coloring, one could easily imagine it vanishing imperceptibly into the blaze of some splendid sunset. While we are talking of Raphael's color it may be interesting to call your attention to a very remarkable fact about his

paintings. He lays the color on the canvas so thin that sometimes one can trace through it the lines of the drawing, and yet his color is so pure and beautiful that he is considered one of the greatest colorists of the world. The next time you see an oil painting, notice how thick or how thin the paint is laid on, and then think of what I have told you of Raphael's method of using color.

[17]

[18]



LA BELLE JARDINIÈRE.

Raphael.

Now while Raphael was painting these drooping-eyed, mild-faced Madonnas and learning great lessons from the masters of Florence, a wonderful honor came to him. He was called to Rome by the Pope and given some of the apartments of the Vatican to decorate in any way he wished.

[19]

The Pope at this time was Julius II. and he was a very interesting man. He was a warrior and had spent many years fighting to gain lands and cities for the Church. When peace returned he was still anxious to do honor to the Church and so, wherever he heard of a great architect, painter, or sculptor, he at once invited him to Rome to do beautiful work for the Church. Already he had set Michael Angelo to work on a grand tomb for him. Bramante, a relative of Raphael's, was working hard to make St. Peter's the most wonderful Church in all the world. Now the young Raphael was to beautify still further the buildings belonging to the church.

Julius did not pretend to be an artist or a scholar, and yet by his patronage he greatly

encouraged art and literature. The story is told that when Angelo was making a statue of the Pope for the town of Bologna, the artist asked Julius if he should place a book in the statue's extended left hand, and the Pope retorted, almost in anger, "What book? Rather a sword—I am no reader!"

In earlier years Florence had been a glorious sight to our artist and now in 1508, standing in the "Eternal City," he was more awed than when first he beheld the city of the Arno. Here the court of Julius, gorgeous and powerful, together with the works of art, like St. Peter's, in process of construction, were but a part of the wonders to be seen. In addition, the remains of ancient Rome were scattered all about—here a row of columns, the only remains of a grand temple, there a broken statue of some god or goddess, long lost to sight, and all the earth about so filled with these treasures that one had only to dig to find some hidden work of art. The Roman people, too, were awake to the fact that they were not only living out a marvelous present, but that they were likewise, in their every day life, walking ever in the presence of a still more wonderful past. I wish, while you are thinking about this, that you would get a picture of the Roman Forum and notice its groups of columns, its triumphal arches, its ruined walls. You will then certainly appreciate more fully what Raphael felt as he went about this city of historic ruins.

[20]

[21]

[22]



MADONNA OF THE FISH.

Raphael.

The Pope received the young artist cordially and at once gave him the vast commission of

painting in fresco three large rooms, or *stanze*, of the Vatican. In addition, he was to decorate the gallery, or corridor, called the *loggia*, leading to these apartments from the stairway. With the painting of these walls Raphael and his pupils were more or less busy during the remainder of the artist's short life. A great many religious and historic subjects were used, besides some invented by Raphael himself, as when he represented *Poetry* by Mount Parnassus inhabited by all the great poets past and present. In these rooms some of his best work is done. Every year thousands of people go to see these pictures and come away more than ever enraptured with Raphael and his work.

[23]

In the loggia are the paintings known collectively as Raphael's Bible. Of the fifty-two pictures in the thirteen arcades of this corridor all but four represent Old Testament scenes. The others are taken from the New Testament. Although Raphael's pupils assisted largely in these frescoes they are very beautiful and will always rank high among the art works of the time.

Raphael's works seem almost perfect even from the beginning, yet he was always studying to get the great points in the work of others and to perfect his own. Perhaps this is the best lesson we may learn from his intellectual life—the lesson of unending study and assimilation. He was greatly interested in the ruins of Rome and we know that he studied them deeply and carefully. This is very evident in the Madonnas of his Roman period. They have a strength and a power to make one think great thoughts that is not so marked in the pictures of his Florentine period.

[24]

[25]



[26]

THE ARCHANGEL.

Detail from *Madonna of the Fish*.*Raphael*.

The "*Madonna of the Fish*" is one of the most beautiful of this time. It was painted

originally for a chapel in Naples where the blind prayed for sight, and where, legend relates, they were often miraculously answered. The divine Mother, a little older than Raphael's virgins of earlier years, is seated on a throne with the ever beautiful child in her arms. The babe gives his attention to the surpassingly lovely angel, Raphael, who brings the young Tobias with his fish into the presence of the Virgin, of whom he would beg the healing of his father who is blind. On the other side he points to a passage in the book held by the venerable St. Jerome. This is doubtless the book of Tobit wherein the story of Tobias is related, and which Tobias translated. Whatever the real purpose of the artist was in introducing St. Jerome, a very beautiful result was attained in contrasting youth and age. Like a human being of note, this picture has had an eventful history. It was stolen from Naples and carried to Madrid and then, in the French wars, it was taken to Paris. It has since been restored to the Prado of Madrid, and there to-day we may feast our eyes on its almost unearthly loveliness. In it the divine painter showed that he knew the heart of a mother and the love of a son; that he appreciated the majesty of age and the heavenly beauty of the angels.

[27]

Hardly less beautiful is the "*Madonna Foligno*," so named from the distant view of the town of Foligno seen under a rainbow in the central part of the picture. In the upper portion, surrounded by angel heads, is the Madonna holding out her child to us. Below is the scene already referred to, the portrait of the donor of the picture, some saints, and a beautiful boy angel. The latter is holding a tablet which is to be inscribed, for this is one of that large class of pictures in Italian Art called *votive*—that is, given to the church by an individual in return for some great deliverance. In this case the donor had escaped, as by a miracle, from a stroke of lightning.

In this short sketch there is time to mention only a few of Raphael's great pictures, but I trust you will be so interested that you will look up about others that are passed over here. There are many very interesting books about Raphael in which you can find descriptions of all of his pictures.

Among other paintings, Raphael made many fine portraits. An excellent likeness of Julius was so well done that, skillfully placed and lighted, it deceived some of the Pope's friends into thinking it the living Julius.

The painting of portraits was not the only departure of our artist from his favorite Madonna or historic subjects. We find him also interested in mythology. Out of this interest grew his "*Galatea*," which he painted for a wealthy nobleman of his acquaintance. In this picture Galatea sails over the sea in her shell-boat drawn by dolphins. She gazes into heaven and seems unconscious of the nymphs sporting about her.

[28]



GALATEA.

Raphael.

Speaking of Raphael's use of mythological subjects, though not quite in the order of time, we may here mention his frescos illustrating the story of Cupid and Psyche, painted on the walls and ceiling of the same nobleman's palace, the Chigi palace. The drawings for these pictures were made by Raphael, but most of the painting was done by his pupils. As we study these pictures of the joys and sorrows of this beautiful pair, we are interested, but we regret that our angel-painter was willing, even for a short time, to leave his own proper subjects, the religious. We feel like saying, "Let men who know not the depth of religious feeling, as did Raphael, paint for us the myth and the secular story, but let us save from any earthly touch our painter of sacred things."

[29]

In 1513 the great Julius died, and Leo X., a member of the famous Medici family of Florence, succeeded to his place. Raphael was in the midst of his paintings in the Vatican, and for a time it was uncertain what the new Pope would think of continuing these expensive decorations. Though lacking the energy of Julius, Leo continued the warrior-pope's policy regarding art works. So Raphael went on unmolested in his work, with now and then a great commission added.

During the life of Leo the power of the Church sunk to a low level, and yet the angel-painter of the Vatican pursued in peace the composition and painting of his lovely works.

The "*St. Cecilia*" was a very important work painted about the time of Julius' death. It was painted for a wealthy woman of Bologna to adorn a chapel which she had built to St. Cecilia, the patroness of music. She had built this chapel because she thought she heard angels telling her to do it; in other words she had obeyed a vision.

[30]

In the picture the saint stands in the centre of a group made up of St. John, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and Mary Magdalene. She holds carelessly in her hands an organ from which the reeds are slipping. What charms can even her favorite instrument have for her when streams of

heaven's own music are reaching her from the angel choir above? Every line of face and figure shows her rapt attention to the celestial singers. The instruments of earthly music lie scattered carelessly about.

While our attention is held most of all by the figure of St. Cecilia, the other persons represented interest us too, especially St. Paul, leaning on his naked sword. (See illustration.) His massive head and furrowed brow show man at his noblest occupation—*thinking*. In delightful contrast is the ever beautiful St. John, the embodiment of youth and love.

[31]



[32]

ST. CECILIA.

Raphael.

When the picture was completed Raphael sent it to his old friend Francia, the artist of Bologna. It is related that Francia, on seeing the wonderful perfection of the picture, died of despair, feeling how poorly he could paint as compared with Raphael. Whether this story be true or not, it is certain that the people of Bologna were much excited over the arrival of the picture and gloried in possessing the vision of St. Cecilia. The picture is still to be seen in Bologna, where it retains its brilliant coloring, slightly mellowed by the passing years.

[33]

The Sistine Chapel was the most beautiful apartment in the Vatican. Its walls were covered

with choicest frescos. Its ceiling, done by the wonder-working hand of Michael Angelo, was a marvel. To add still more to the beauty of this Chapel, Leo ordered Raphael to draw cartoons for ten tapestries to be hung below the lowest tier of paintings. Now you know that cartoons are the large paper drawings made previous to frescos and tapestries to serve as patterns.

Raphael selected ten subjects from the Acts of the Apostles. His designs were accepted and sent to Arras in Flanders where the most beautiful tapestries were manufactured. The cartoons were cut into strips that they might be more conveniently used. In 1518 the tapestries, woven of silk, wool, and gold, were finished and brought to Rome, where they were greatly admired.



[34]

MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

Raphael.

In 1527, Rome was sacked by savage soldiers and many of her choicest things carried away. Among them were these tapestries. They were sold and then restolen by Jews, who thought to separate the gold by burning them. They tried this with one and found that the quantity of gold was so small that it was not worth the trouble, and so the others were spared and sold to a merchant of Genoa. They were finally recovered in a faded condition and are now in the Vatican.

[35]

Meanwhile the cartoons were forgotten and three of them lost. The Flemish artist, Rubens, came across those remaining, however, and recommended Charles I. of England to purchase them for his palace at Whitehall. Later Cromwell bought them for the nation, and today we may see them pasted together and carefully mounted in South Kensington Museum, London. "*The Miraculous Draught of Fishes,*" (see opposite page,) is one of the best known of the series. All are bold and strong in drawing, and several are very beautiful, as "*Paul and John at the Beautiful Gate.*" One critic, in speaking of the cartoons, says they mark the climax of Raphael's art.

We must not forget that all these years, while Raphael was making these wonderful cartoons and pictures, the work on the rooms of the Vatican was going steadily forward. He certainly was a busy man!

Probably the best known of Raphael's Madonnas is "*The Madonna della Sedia*," so called because the mother sits in a chair. A delightful story is told of the painting of this picture. [36]

Many years ago there lived in a quiet valley in Italy a hermit who was greatly loved by all the people round about, for he taught them and he helped them in sickness and in trouble. His hut was near a giant oak tree that sheltered him from the sun of summer and the biting winds of winter. In the constant waving of its branches, too, it seemed to converse with him, and so he said he had two intimate friends, one that could talk, and one that was mute. By the one that could talk he meant the vine-dresser's daughter who lived near by and who was very kind to him. By the mute one he meant this sheltering oak.

Now, one winter a great storm arose, and when the hermit saw that his hut was unsafe, his mute friend seemed to beckon him to come up among the branches. Gathering a few crusts, he went up into the tree where, with hundreds of bird companions, his life was saved, though his hut was destroyed. Just as he thought he should die of hunger, Mary, the vine-dresser's daughter, came to see her old friend and took him to her home. Then the pious hermit, Benardo, prayed that his two friends might be glorified together in some way. [37]



MADONNA DELLA SEDIA.

Raphael.

Time wore on. The hermit died, the oak tree was cut down and converted into wine casks, and the lovely Mary married and was the mother of two boys. One day as she sat with her children, a young man passed by. His eyes were restless, and one might have known him for a poet or a painter in whose mind a celestial vision was floating. Suddenly he saw the young mother and her two children. The painter, for it was Raphael, now beheld his vision made flesh and blood. But he had only a pencil. On what could he draw the beautiful group? He seized the [39]

clean cover of a wine cask near by and drew upon it the lines to guide him in his painting. He went home and filled out his sketch in loveliest color, and ever since the world has been his debtor for giving it his heavenly vision. So the hermit's prayer was answered. His two friends were glorified together.

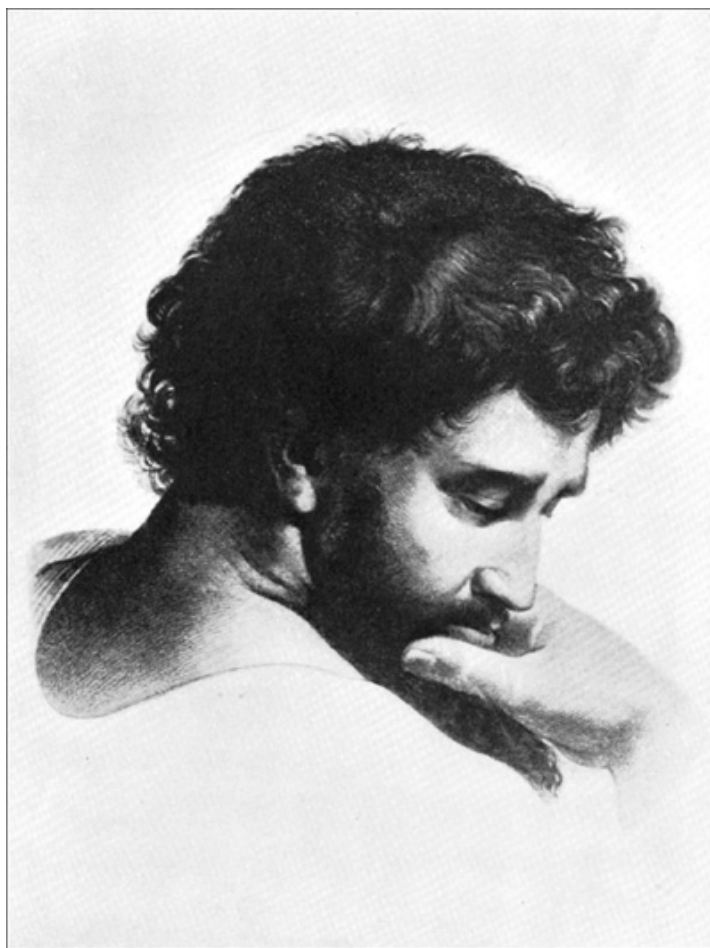
Other honors, besides those coming from his paintings, were showered upon Raphael at this time. He was now rich, and the Cardinal Bibbiena offered him his niece Maria in marriage. It was considered a great thing in those times to be allied by marriage to a church dignitary, but Raphael had higher honors, and so, while he accepted the offer rather than offend the cardinal, he put off the wedding until Maria died. His heart was not in this contract because for years he had loved a humble but beautiful girl, Margherita, who was probably the model of some of his sweetest Madonnas.

Speaking of the honors thrust upon Raphael, we must not forget that the Pope made him architect-in-chief of St. Peter's on the death of Bramante. He was also appointed to make drawings of the ancient city of Rome, in order that the digging for buried remains might be carried on more intelligently.

[40]

In every Madonna we have described, we have had to use freely the words *lovely*, *great*, *beautiful*, but one there remains which, more than any other, merits all these titles and others in addition. It is the "*Sistine Madonna*" in the Dresden Gallery. It was the last picture painted wholly by Raphael's hand. It was painted originally as a banner for the monks of St. Sixtus at Piacenza, but it was used as an altar-piece. In 1754, the Elector of Saxony bought it for \$40,000 and it was brought to Dresden with great pomp. People who know about pictures generally agree that this is the greatest picture in the world.

[41]



[42]

ST. PAUL.

Detail from *St. Cecilia*. Let us see some of the things^{Raphael}.

which it contains—no one can ever tell you all, for as the years increase and your lives are enlarged by joy and by sorrow, you will ever see more and more in this divine picture and feel more than you see. Two green curtains are drawn aside and there, floating on the clouds, is the Virgin full length, presenting the Holy Child to the world. It is far more than a mother and child, for one sees in the Madonna a look suggesting that she sees vaguely the darkness of Calvary and the glory of the resurrection. This is no ordinary child, either, that she holds, for He sees beyond this world into eternity and that His is no common destiny;—at least, one feels these things as we gaze at the lovely apparition on its background of clouds and innumerable angel heads. St. Sixtus on one side would know more of this mystery, while St. Barbara on the other is dazzled by the vision and turns aside her lovely face. Below are the two cherubs, the final touch of love, as it were, to this marvellous picture.

[43]

It is said that the picture was completed at first without these cherubs and that they were afterwards added when Raphael found two little boys resting their arms on a balustrade, gazing intently up at his picture.

This painting has a room to itself in the Dresden Gallery, where the most frivolous forget to chat and the thoughtful sit for hours in quiet meditation under its magic spell. One man says, “I could spend an hour every day for years looking at this picture and on the last day of the last year discover some new beauty and a new joy.”

There was now great division of opinion in Rome as to whether Angelo or Raphael were the greater painter. Cardinal de Medici ordered two pictures for the Cathedral of Narbonne, in France, one by Raphael and one by Sebastian Piombo, a favorite pupil of Angelo's. People knew that Angelo would never openly compete with Raphael, but they also felt sure that he would assist his pupil. The subject chosen by Raphael was “*The Transfiguration*.” But suddenly, even before this latest commission was completed, that magic hand had been stopped by death. The picture, though finished by Raphael's pupils, is a great work. The ascending Lord is the point of greatest interest in the upper, or celestial part, while the father with his demoniac child, holds our attention in the lower, or terrestrial portion. At his funeral this unfinished picture hung above the dead painter, and his sorrowing friends must have felt, as Longfellow wrote of Hawthorne when he lay dead with an unfinished story on his bier,—

[44]

“Ah, who shall lift that wand of magic power,
And the lost clew regain?
The unfinished window in Aladdin's tower
Unfinished must remain.”

[45]

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

