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Philip A. László, Portrait Painter

A HUNGARIAN PORTRAIT
PAINTER: PHILIP A. LÁSZLÓ.
BY DR. GABRIEL VON TÉREY.

WITH the name of László a whole world of fascinating and significant figures rises before us. Beautiful women of every nation are presented to us in his characteristic manner: queens, princesses, aristocrats, well-known members of society, and, finally, an almost endless series of men belonging to the upper ranks of life and the aristocracy of talent. It is difficult to realise what a wealth of fruitful activity lies behind this artist, only eight-and-thirty years of age at the present day. It seems but a short time since he began the career that has led him from triumph to triumph, bringing him early that fame which is often but grudgingly bestowed on others in their latest years. László's work has already been described here at length (*THE STUDIO*, October, 1901), and, as may be remembered, an account of his life was then given.

I have now, therefore, only to undertake the task of describing the artist's work with an analysis of his personality, and its development up to the present time. But a rich, nay an almost too rich, amount of material lies before us, in which it would be easy to lose ourselves, as in a labyrinth. To bring order into this chaos our best plan would be to discuss first László's successive periods, each sharply differentiated from the others and bearing evident traces of diverse influences; then to demonstrate how the artist has freed himself from these influences; and finally to show how he has escaped from them the richer or the poorer as the case may be; but this would carry us too far, and a briefer survey must suffice.

László's development has proceeded throughout in a harmonious manner without leading him into any extremes, and this may very likely be because he is so highly gifted in technical capacity. With him there has been no hard struggle for self-expression;

what he wanted to say he had no difficulty in saying, and means of self-expression were always at his command in a quite extraordinary way. This does not mean that knowledge came easily to him; he has studied with diligent industry, and has laid down for himself a foundation too often lacking in the case of modern painters. In addition to this fundamental groundwork come the gifts which an artist either has or has not, enabling those who possess them in a high degree to rise at a bound above the level of mediocrity; and László's very earliest works, on which his fame was founded, already bore the stamp of ripened maturity. The most notable among them is probably the portrait of the connoisseur, Bishop Bubics of Kassa. In his grip of his subject, in his treatment of the drapery and the hands, we already recognise the László of after days; but in the head the artist



THE DUCHESS OF TECK

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ

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strikes a note which rings like a forewarning of his later, much later, maturity, and in this head is promise of the future. Illuminated by a well-directed mellow white light, the face shows an easy skill in execution that can scarcely be equalled for mastery of style; it makes us think of wax or of marble, and it is indeed a work of plastic art in colour that we have before us here. Owing to this carefully-studied representation of the features the fleeting spiritual expression of the moment is evolved for us quite naturally from what is purely corporeal; it shines from the mild eyes, and plays around the fine, half-sceptical, half-kindly mouth. László has also given us portraits of Leo XIII. and Cardinal Rampolla, and the pictures I have mentioned are landmarks in the artist's career. To this category must be added the justly-admired portrait of the German Chancellor, Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, which obtained the great gold medal at the last Paris Exhibition. Between these lies a well-nigh innumerable series of likenesses, each of which bears the mark of its value according to the personality of the individual model, the artist's inspiration, and the length or shortness of the time expended upon it.

The world in which our artist moves, the world where his work is loved and whence he draws his inspiration, is that of the upper ten thousand. It is a world which stands far apart from need and strife, where everything connected with beauty and luxury can develop unhindered. The women who belong to this sphere have, amidst other more important tasks, that of being beautiful and dressing beautifully. They are well aware of their external advantages and are fully conscious of every gesture they make, and yet they give the impression of perfectly natural ease. These are László's models, just as they were the favourite models of Vandyck, Reynolds and Gainsborough. They feel that the master who is painting them sympathises with them, and during the sittings, which, thanks to the master's easy unfettered methods, are carried

on under the stimulus of lively conversation, the model unconsciously assists in the success of the picture by exhibiting that side of his or her nature which is best calculated to inspire an artist. László works remarkably quickly. Where others, even great painters, make use of preliminary studies, photographs, etc., he sketches in the outlines of a head, eyes, nose and mouth, with a few bold strokes of the brush, proceeding then with the detailed working-out of the painting. This dashing style is nearly always successful with him, and gives his colour-sketches their peculiar charm; it is in this way that he succeeds so admirably in catching the special fascination of women.

How difficult it is to know where to begin an enumeration of all who belong to this gallery of beauty, and what famous names are here! An artist's greatness, moreover, lies in *what* and not in



COUNTESS SCHÖNBÖRN

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ



PRINCESS DIETRICHSTEIN WITH
HER SON. BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ

Philip A. László, Portrait Painter

whom he paints. Still, we will let them pass in review, these princesses and aristocratic ladies, the great people of society or of the world of art, who have inspired the artist either by beauty or by interest of expression. There is Princess Dietrichstein with her little child, in a landscape setting; Princess Windisch-Graetz, with the fascinating charm of her great dark eyes; Countess Larisch, one of the most delightful creations of the artist; Princess Lichtenstein, *née* Archduchess of Austria; the charming face of Baroness Erlanger; Princess Pauline Metternich, whose intellectual features must have provided the artist with a peculiarly grateful task; Countess Trani (sister of the late Empress and Queen Elizabeth), whose portrait shows a suggestion of Lenbach's style, severe, simple, characteristic, rich in tones of colour which are quite unforced, and so refined that they can hardly be properly appreciated save by an artist; Alice Barbi, with her splendid tragic face, which he has managed to realise so completely; Countess Fersen, who fascinates us by the peculiar sphinx-like expression of her eyes; Countess Schönborn, represented by the artist with her little daughter in a very characteristic manner; Baroness Tuyll, a well-known Dutch beauty, whom the artist has depicted in a large hat and looking straight before her. And then among the French aristocracy we may mention the portrait of Countess Castellane, who has inspired the painter in a work full of temperament; Countess Dezasse, typically French with her dark eyes, black hair, and proudly noble features. The artist has painted several portraits of his own wife (who comes of a well-known Irish family) with her beautiful fair hair and sincere eyes, and one of them (p. 266) shows her to be a musician. Among the artist's most deeply felt pictures is a portrait of his mother, with great, wise, almost visionary eyes, and a likeness of his sister-in-law,

Miss Guinness, treated with a Rembrandt-like effect of lighting.

In his arrangement of group-portraits László follows the example of the great English painters of the eighteenth century. He likes to place his groups (I am now thinking of those two pictures which represent the family of the Duc de Gramont) in a landscape-setting, by preference in a park, and the grouping then comes about naturally and harmoniously.

He manages with great cleverness to soften the contrast between the different effects of the more picturesque attire of the ladies and the necessarily modern costume of the men. It is easily to be understood that a painter of taste who has a special love for portraying the attributes of female grace can have no great liking for the unpicturesque dress of our men; but thanks to the exalted



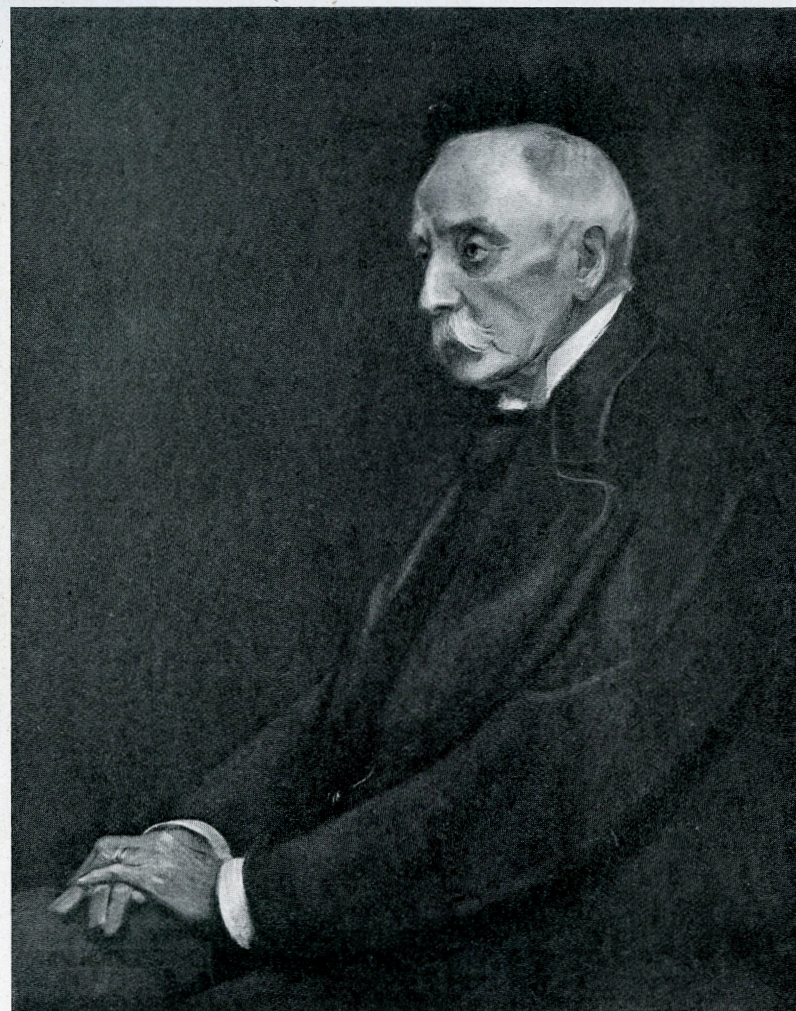
COUNTESS FERSEN

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ



COUNTRESS ILDA DEZASSE

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ



PRINCE A. HOHENLOHE-SCHILLINGSFÜRST

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ

Philip A. László, Portrait Painter

position of his sitters László often has an opportunity of painting his subjects in the costume belonging to some particular office or rank. Robes of this sort raise a picture above mere fashion, efface the indications of date, and add their own special contribution to the picturesque effect. The portrait of the German Ambassador to Japan is an interesting picture in this respect. As a painter of men's portraits László is no less successful than as a painter of beautiful women; indeed he often has an opportunity here of being the more impressive, because he has not mere external form and charm to convey, but mind and character. He devotes to drapery only so much attention as is absolutely necessary, and can therefore bestow greater study on the face. A shining instance of this is afforded by the portrait of Count Chotek, the late father-in-law of the heir to the thrones of Austria and Hungary. The clean-shaven face with barely-indicated whiskers represents a distinctly Austrian type; the wise and kindly eyes, the firmly-closed mouth with narrow, finely-chiselled upper lip, show energy and good nature. The pose of the hands is full of action; we can see them explaining and gesticulating. Another notable example is the portrait of the late Duke of Cambridge; it was no small achievement to catch such a speaking likeness of features thus blurred by old age. The portrait of the Duke of Teck is picturesquely conceived; the sitter wears a uniform with his military cloak thrown over it. A portrait of Lord Stanley of Alderley, executed with much loving care, is noble and impressive. The portrait of the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London, Count Mensdorff, is a speaking likeness of the sitter's very agreeable and manly presence. The portrait of the King of Portugal is a work full of power and sim-

plicity; here László has denied himself all external advantages, representing the King in a plain dark coat. The artist has quite recently been commissioned to paint the portrait of an Indian rajah, and it is a particularly attractive face which he here places upon his canvas; the brownish-yellow complexion is especially interesting, with great calm eyes looking out from beneath their heavy lids, a broad flattened nose, red lips, while wound round the head is a coloured Indian cloth, which partially covers the brow and ears and falls on the shoulders.

I have spoken above of landmarks in László's career; the portrait of Monsignor Count Peter Vay, well known in England, is one such landmark, and in it the artist's latest period has attained high-water mark. A striking head, a proud and noble figure, has here rivetted the eye of the painter. The fine aristocratic features,



CHILDREN OF MR. VAN HONERT

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ



HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF
PORTUGAL. BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ

Philip A. László, Portrait Painter

the clear steel-blue eyes, the high-arched nose, the narrow lips with their wonderful play of mingled good-nature and delicate sarcasm—all this László has depicted in quite masterly style. Drapery plays a great part in this picture; the artist has been able to revel in purples and reds, displaying the most delicate gradation of tones in the folds of the material. All is painted with freshness and mellowness, and with a breadth and certainty which denote the great artist. The long, slim, nervous hands, placed in a manner highly characteristic of the sitter, are also very fine. The background is kept in two shades of red—a bold experiment which could only be successful in the hands of a painter absolutely certain of himself.

One especially happy feature of this painting is the combination of broad technique with perfect finish. The artist laid down his brush at a moment when the picture was still fresh, when every stroke helped to give it life, when each actual detail was fully expressed. How few there are who know how to do this! How much our present-day portraiture suffers from two extremes: on the one hand sheer daubing, a mass of spots of colour, in which only the closest inspection renders a human form discernible; on the other hand too highly-finished work, which lays as great stress on unnecessary accessories as on the really important details.

László never falls under the curse of these two extremes. Even the portraits most recently exe-

cuted by him, such as those of Count Larisch, the Vicomte de Montesquiou, the clever critic, and the Vicomte de Paris, bear the stamp of ripeness and lucidity. Those who have visited the artist's studio during the last few months have had the opportunity of admiring the portraits of Count Schön-

born, Count Berchtold (Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to the Russian Court), the Archduchess Maria Theresa, Princess Kinsky, and the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse, besides the group of Countess Wenckheim with her two children. These are all finished pictures. But when the painter dashes off his clever sketches on paper, even then he is never superficial; everything is carried out to the right point, no characteristic detail



PORTRAIT STUDY

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ

is omitted. The colour-sketch of Professor Joachim, of which an excellent reproduction accompanies this article, is a notable instance of this sort; it expresses the personality of the master—now more than seventy-five years of age—so perfectly that we cannot complain of having a mere sketch before us. It is a true musician's head that László has portrayed here. Quietly contemplative, the blue eyes gaze out from behind the spectacles. The grey hair falls across a finely-modelled, intellectual brow, to which the happy arrangement of the light gives full value. The expression of the mouth is particularly successful and lifelike. It shows austerity and severity, and withal much kindness and gentleness. We feel instinctively that this great violinist has



PORTRAIT OF PRINCESS WINDISCH-GRAETZ BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ.



HIS EXCELLENCY COUNT MENSORFF

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ



H.R.H. THE LATE DUKE OF CAMBRIDGE

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ



THE ARTIST'S WIFE

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ



COMTE DE MONTESQUIOU

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ

Philip A. László, Portrait Painter

lived through much, that he has not reached the heights of classical perfection by mere jesting and trifling. All great art is dearly paid for. László has immortalised another artist, or rather, virtuoso of the violin—Jan Kubelik. This sketch is all fire and temperament. How life-like is the glance of those dark eyes!

Having briefly reviewed László's work up to the present day—having noted at least some of his masterpieces of the last six to ten years, let us cast a glance into another little world in which he has made himself at home, the world of childhood. I shall never forget what a deep impression the portrait of little Daniela made upon me some years ago; the lovely radiant face in its frame of fair hair, the airy transparency of the dress leaving the neck and shoulders bare, the charming action of the hands. There was an astonishing freshness about this child, an expression not easily forgotten. Then there was another deliciously spontaneous picture of little Sabina, quite unique in its way. The little maiden wears a roguish expression on her face, and has a pale blue ribbon in her tousled hair. The portrait of Princess Victoria, daughter of the German Emperor, gives full value to the vivacious, healthy nature of the sitter. In his own three children László possesses a constant

source of happy inspiration. He has frequently painted his eldest son Henry, once in a velvet suit and lace collar, quite in the Reynolds style, with flaxen hair falling in long curls over his shoulders. Now that the curls have been cut off, leaving a head of the Rubens type, László has no less often painted his son's portrait, usually in a light-coloured sailor suit. A red-chalk drawing in three-quarters profile is particularly successful, and the pretty lines of the boy's head are well expressed.

We have followed this gifted portrait-painter up to the present day. It is safe to predict that he will pass through many other phases of development; his persevering industry and restless energy will not allow him to cease from striving, for in him as in every sincere artist dwell the instinct of acute self-criticism and the longing after the highest perfection.

G. v. T.

At a general meeting of the Society of 25 English Painters held recently it was decided to eliminate the word "English" from the title of the Society, which will henceforth be known as "The Society of 25 Painters," so that in future all artists who are British born subjects will be eligible for election as members. We are requested to state that the committee has made arrangements with Messrs. Mar-

chant & Co. with reference to their exhibitions, in pursuance of which these will hereafter be held at the Goupil Gallery, 5 Regent Street. Several new features will be introduced, a summer exhibition of sketches, etc., full details of which will be announced in due course. All the members of the Society have received an invitation from the Mayor of Barcelona to exhibit in the British section of the International Exhibition which has recently been opened in that city. It is interesting to note the Society's exhibition at Berlin was very successful, and is being followed by exhibitions at Düsseldorf, Munich, Hamburg, and other German cities.



DR. GABRIEL VON TÉREY

BY P. A. LÁSZLÓ