

JEHANGIR AND HIS ARTISTS

THERE are few more agreeable interludes in the biographies of great men of action than those passages in their lives which tell of their sympathies with art and artists. Such phases in the character of an Alexander, a Lorenzo, or a Napoleon seem to transfigure these potent personalities and reveal the great Conqueror, Statesman, and Soldier in a milder light. Its humanising power is perhaps art's most catholic characteristic. We turn from our contemplation of Alexander the tamer of the horse Bucephalus, the invincible leader of the Macedonian phalanx, and the unrestrained slayer of his best friend, to Alexander, the man of taste, who chose that the unique Persian casket which had been brought to him from among the spoils of King Darius should be used as a receptacle for the Iliad of Homer, but for no lesser jewel. We dwell on the thought of a Napoleon insisting on a masterpiece of painting forming a necessary feature in a treaty of Peace; and we resent being told by our modern iconoclasts that Leonardo da Vinci did not die in the arms of King Francis after all, and that Shâh Jehân did not breathe his last while contemplating the distant Taj! Not willingly would we consent to class as apocryphal these stories which seem of the essence of canonical truth, or those others of how Philip of Spain painted with his own hand the badge of ennoblement across the breast of Velasquez's own portrait, how Charles V. stooped to pick up the brush Titian had let fall, and how he checked the murmurs of his courtiers with the reproof: "I can create others like you, but I cannot create another Titian."

"Consider the respect which must have been paid to great Artists", wrote one who admired the Ancients, "when such a man as Socrates pronounced them the only wise men. Æsop took the greatest pleasure in lounging in their painting rooms; Marcus Aurelius took lessons in philosophy from an artist, and always said that the latter first taught him to distinguish the true from the false; and when Paulus Æmilius sent to the Athenians for one

of their ablest philosophers to educate his children, they selected Metrodorus, the painter, and, let it be remembered, that amongst the children placed under *his* care was one of the Scipios. What must have been the effect on the rising youth of Greece when the Amphictyonic Council decreed that Polygnotus, their greatest monumental painter, should be maintained at the public expense wherever he went, as a mark of the national admiration for his greatest work, the Hall at Delphi ? ”

Tempora mutantur! Europe can at any rate point proudly to the Art Patronage of the Past—can heave a sigh of retrospection still audible, even amidst the whirr of her flying men and the roar of her multitudinous machinery. India can equal if not surpass the record.

Indeed the vital spark of patronage glowed brightly for so long in India as almost to lead one to hope that its present eclipse cannot signify extinction ; that the flame still burns somewhere or other, to blaze abroad again in its due time, as the opening of the grave of a Rosicrucian was said to reveal within it the ever-burning lamp, (shining as brightly as ever), of the long buried magician !

To attempt to parallel a Lorenzo with a Jehângîr or a Julius II with a Shâh Jehân would be more ingenious than instructive ; for, of course, all great patrons of art the world over have come of a common origin. Like the Montresors in Edgar Poe's story they are “ a great and numerous family, ” and the noble family traits are unmistakeable. The true scion of this world-wide family has always been distinguished from the connoisseur and the virtuoso by breadth of vision, and courage. The connoisseur may boast of his Moghul Paintings, his Old Prints, his Blue and White China, his “ Old Masters ” ; but rarely indeed does he show original taste, or the courage to buy, from unknown artists, work whose value has not been stabilised by Time and the dealers. He prides himself—not upon his patronage of artists—but upon his acquisitive capacities ; he will talk of his love for a portrait by Titian, which he had cleverly obtained for an old song from an impoverished owner, or perhaps one who did not understand its value ; will tell us how he has come to regard this picture as quite indispensable, and how a sight of it at least once a day has become an essential indulgence for his fierce aesthetic cravings. And the plain man believes in all his vehemence and cannot but draw comparisons between this gifted being, endowed with such super-sensitive appreciation for the Beautiful, and his

mundane self ; until one day he reads in his daily paper that his fastidious friend had sold his Titian patriotically to an American magnate for the "nominal sum" of fifty thousand pounds !

The business of the Art Patron on the other hand is the very reverse of this glorified picture-dealer's. His business is not to sell, but to buy. He is always generous ; frequently absurdly generous. He is sometimes taken in, but still follows the lure of art, and does not care two pins about the intrinsic value of the style of a picture which he fancies. His idea is to give many artists a chance. We feel that Plutarch is wrong when he says that Alexander refused to have his portrait made by any other sculptor than Lysippus, not because of the arguments advanced against this statement by the commentators, but simply because Alexander indubitably belonged to the "great and numerous family" of the Art Patrons, and such exclusiveness is at variance with the family traits. Your true Art Patron is not afraid of making mistakes.

The pages of that enthralling book, the *Memoirs of the Emperor Jehângîr*, abound in interesting indications of the actions and opinions of a great patron of art. A modern historian—Mr. Vincent Smith—has well observed "Art really interested Jehângîr. His book is full of references to the subject, which it would be desirable to collect and discuss". His love of nature has been cited as Jehângîr's most pleasing characteristic, but it did not stop with his descriptions in poetry and poetic prose ; he loved the graphic delineation also.

Very early in the *Memoirs*¹ the sculptors come into the picture. "In this place had been erected by my order a *mandor* at the head of a grave of an antelope called *Man-saraj*. . . . on account of the rare quality of this antelope, I commanded that no person should hunt the deer of this plain, They made the gravestone in the shape of an antelope". When encamped at Basawâl his artistic eye detects an even more novel possibility : "A white rock was present in the river bed. I ordered them to carve it in the form of an elephant."

On the Imperial journeys the artists are an integral unit of the Sovereign's escort, and at all times and seasons he calls upon their services.

Thus at another halt they brought Jehângîr—who was an ardent naturalist—"a piebald animal like the flying

(1) For all the extracts from *Jehângîr's Memoirs* in this article I am indebted to the translation of Messrs. Rogers and Beveridge.

mouse, which in the Hindi tongue they call *galahri* (squirrel), and said that mice would not frequent any house in which this animal was. . . . as I had never seen one before, I ordered my painters to draw a likeness of it". The Emperor was no stickler for the academic forms of beauty in the models he chose to set before his artists.

Indeed in the following incident one might discover a pre-futuristic symptom of the cult of ugliness—Europe's modern fetish!

When a dervish from Ceylon had brought him "a strange animal", whose "face was exactly like a large bat, and whose whole shape was like that of a monkey, but it had no tail", he explains that, "as the creature appeared very strange, I ordered the artists to take a likeness of it in various kinds of movement. It looked very ugly".

Jehângîr was not unaware of the limitations of the Art of the period as well as of its possibilities. After describing with the keen interest of a naturalist a pair of pet kids—"their liveliness and laughable ways, and their manner of gambolling and leaping,") he adds the observation that, "it is notorious that painters cannot draw properly the motions of a kid. Granting that they may chance to draw the movements of an ordinary kid after a fashion, they certainly would have to acknowledge themselves at a loss how to draw the motions of these kids." The Grand Moghul could become eloquent over the merits of a picture; a work containing 240 figures by Khâlîl Mîrza Shâhrûki, which was given to him as a present, caused him exquisite delight.

Jehângîr was an all-round patron and art critic, and there are ample evidences in his Memoirs, of his gift of *thinking* pictorially. Not only is this faculty revealed in his brilliant scenic descriptions of Kashmir, and innumerable beauty-spots of India, but it crops up repeatedly in instances as charming as they are unexpected. At one time he saw a wild ass "exceedingly strange" in appearance, which he fully describes, concluding: "round the eyes there was an exceedingly fine black line. One might say the painter of fate, with a strange brush, had left it on the page of the world".

Himself an enthusiastic gardener he could not have failed to appreciate the artistic value of flowers, and narrates how one of his artists had painted more than a hundred of the different varieties of the wonderful *flora*

of Kashmir. The breadth and scope of Jehângîr's taste in art makes it probable that there is little exaggeration in the well known stories of his eagerness for examples of European painting wherever he could obtain these; and we can readily understand the often quoted accounts of Roe, the British Ambassador, and of the Jesuit Fathers.

All art interested Jehângîr, and all artists were naturally protégés of this genial member of "the great and numerous family."

What could be more illuminating, what possible labour of historical research could better explain the flourishing condition of Indian painting during the best Moghul period, than the following passage, in which the liberal and living spirit of encouragement seems to permeate every line?

"Abu-l-Hâsan the painter," writes Jehângîr, "who has been honoured with the title of Nâdiru -z-zaman, drew the picture of my accession as the frontispiece of the Jehângîr-nâmâ and brought it to me. As it was worthy of all praise, he received endless favours. His work was perfect, and his picture is one of the *chefs d'oeuvre* of the age. At the present time he has no rival or equal. If at this day the masters Abdu'l-Hayy, and Bihzâd were alive, they would have done him justice....."

From his earliest years up to the present time I have always looked after him, till his art has arrived at this rank. Truly he has become Nâdirah-i-zamân (wonder of the age)!" There follows the celebrated passage in which Jehângîr explains, and glories in his own understanding of the art—a passage which can well bear repetition: "My liking for painting and my practice in judging it have arrived at such a point that when any work is brought before me, either of deceased artists or of those of the present day, without the names being told me, I say on the spur of the moment that it is the work of such and such a man. And if there be a picture containing many portraits, and each face be the work of a different master, I can discover which face is the work of each of them. If any other person has put in the eye and eyebrow of a face, I can perceive whose work the original face is, and who has painted the eye and eye-brow." The man of affairs may only see in the artistic pride of the mighty ruler of Hindustan, something as incongruous as the gesture of the Emperor Charles when he stooped to pick up Titian's brush! For the genuine patron, however eminent, is scarcely better understood by the world than

the artist ; and because he feels this, he is fain to make common cause with the latter. The sympathetic bond, which has in all times united Artist and Patron, is not the least strong of human ties ; less powerful than Love itself, but as binding in this respect that it also can overleap chasmic divisions of rank. For if the patron has often to pay a price for the sake of art, not by any means comprised within the limits of pounds, shillings, and pence, art must inevitably repay its full quota in the scheme of mutual interdependence. Patronage is not an art but an instinct, and those who try to *assume* the ingratiating rôle of art's champion, cut as sorry a figure as did the jackdaw strutting in peacocks' feathers. The Patron is the vital centre of nature's scheme of artistic creation ; a constantly recurring phenomenon, always inexplicable but always effective. He is the heart of another solar system of human lights which can only endow the world with their starry brilliance while he continues to shine upon them. During periods of eclipse, when he has sunk in temporary extinction, Art has sadly re-echoed the impassioned statement of Timon of Athens,—how that he had changed

“ As the moon does by wanting light to give :
But then renew I could not like the moon ;
There were no suns to borrow of.”

Such great men as Jehângîr—for by virtue of the aspects of his character which have here been glanced at Jehângîr *was* a great man—are vicarious progenitors of genius. It was scarcely less wonderful to have been *in loco parentis* to such as Abu'l-Hasan, and Mansûr, than it was to have executed their paintings under a vivifying influence.

“ Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be,”

sang Tennyson ; but no system has yet been devised by man to replace the Celestial System of the patron and his artists ! True, the passing of the princely props of culture has forced modern man to cudgel his brains to invent substitutes. But the academies of Europe with their stereotyped patronage cannot fill the individual's place, and the Government can only encourage art effectively when it is moved by the patron's magnetic touch.

With Jehângîr's advent the Hour and the Man had come once more for Indian painting ; and at his passing, there passed with him one of the brightest phases of Moghul Art.

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