II

John Lafarge's "Masterpieces of Painting"*

This work is published uniform in style with the author's previous volume, *Great Masters,* and as in the case of that book, the essays which comprise the new volume were originally prepared for periodical publication in a magazine. They were admirably adapted for that purpose, but they appear to even better advantage in collected form. For example, several of the longer articles in the magazine were broken into two, three, and even four parts; and while the actual, physical division is here retained, the pieces now fit together in continuous sequence, and overcome the impression of fragmentariness and desultoriness of treatment unavoidable in the original method of presentation.

The scheme which Mr. Lafarge adopted for his *Hundred Masterpieces* is precisely the opposite of that employed in *Great Masters,* and is naturally more interesting from the personal or autobiographical point of view, since it involves a far more complicated process of selection. These essays, constituting, as they do, a cross-section of art through the ages, are, in reality, a series of very intimate and penetrating meditations upon the nature and means of artistic expression, and, on the whole, they contain less criticism than emotion and revery. These reach their deepest note in such essays as "Dreams of Happiness" and "The Sadness of Certain Portraits," though they pervade all the chapters, taking on a special and very charming tenderness in "Portraits of Children," and in the exquisitely playful description of Titian's "Story of Fertility" in *Allegories—Part Two:*

> Most of these little loves are winged, and those who are not, if any, would soon see them sprout, if needed. So they fly about, those that like, and gather fruit from trees above: the wish that every child must have before the days of climbing is answered at once for them. And others cry, "Come down, come back; there's plenty here, and we have basketsful." So they have and are cramming for dear life. But the fruit still drops down; some catch it cleverly; one big ball has fallen on an astonished baby's head; in that land of allegory fruit is always ripe and soft, and cannot hurt the softest baby. And others cry, "We have found a rabbit"; whereupon they tumble over one another for proper or undivided possession. You can see one winged one plunging from the trees right down on the frightened beast and its little circle of admiring owners. One baby protests at all this selfishness; his little face puts on the only mark of discontent, which would leave it if he too could get into the ring of fine proprietors. No, there is another: he is being choked by another from pure affection or because some one wants his apple as much as he. Two in our near foreground kiss each other—baby boy, perhaps, and baby girl—in that sudden affection we have so often seen. We can even, I think, make out which kisses and which lets itself be kissed. And there will be a fight soon; a youngster in the foreground is aiming an arrow at another's apple—as in the story of William Tell.
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> Meanwhile, in all the big tumble, one has had enough, and is down on his back and is soon fast asleep.
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> Meanwhile, one of Mamma's girls—on the right there—calls to the winged ones above, with an empty basket held far out. Is it a request to fill it or a ruse to get them down out of mischief? Far off a little circle of cupids dance in a ring with one long scarf to trip them.
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> On all this picture of baby bliss, of cheerful plenty, the statue of their Divine Mother looks down.

Thus, with much more than mere literary grace and skill, Mr. Lafarge divines and responds to what is deeply and humanly felt by Titian himself—perhaps, with a note of modern sentiment which suggests Swinburne and Maeterlinck, develops the mood even beyond the painter's playful intention—in this gaily innocent Anacreontic conceit. At the same time he misses none of the allegorical implications—the general idea embodied in a particular scene, to adopt his own

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definition,—which makes of this picture, as it were, a miniature and embryonic foreshadowing of the great world of humanity with all its principles of action, and all its motives of passionate desire, clearly imprinted in the design.

It is this quality of sympathy and insight, this power to perceive and to prolong the meaning of a picture, that, in spite of his rare technical knowledge and understanding, constitute Mr. Lafarge's major claim to rank as a critic, and that makes him, even more, a charming poet and a profound philosopher of life.

Cleveland Palmer.