

Cosimo, and greatly admired the work of Michel Angelo. Francis I. of France succeeded in attracting del Sarto to his Court, where, however, he only appears to have remained one year: he died at Florence of the plague in 1531. We know something as to his personal character, for tradition tells us that he was over-indulgent to a beautiful but careless wife; and it may be gathered from certain recorded facts that he was not very trustworthy in his financial dealings.

The National collection fortunately contains his own portrait by himself (No. 690). We have, therefore, Andrea del Sarto before us, with the keenly delicate face, the bright intelligent eyes, and somewhat sensuous mouth—a true type of an artist's face.

Any one who has lived in Florence knows the peculiar charm of Fiesole, the conical mountain with its winding road dotted with vine-clad villas and capped by its monastery. Those who have wandered over it, know the wonderful relics of Etruscan life which are left in its ruined theatre and its walls, built of monoliths that still remain as triumphs and marvels of early engineering. But from Florence itself Fiesole is a hill lit by the sunsets which the Florentine painters dearly loved, to which the memory instinctively turns when we think of Florence. Let us, therefore, look at del Sarto's portrait and see him, as Browning saw him, when—

"A common greyness silvers everything—
All in a twilight."

His youth, his hope, his art—

"Being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent wall across the way
Holds the trees safer huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything
A twilight piece."

This, then, is the atmosphere in which he painted; let us turn to his work. One of the most superb pictures in the world is his *Madonna dette delle Arpie*, in the Uffizzi gallery at Florence. The Virgin and Child in faultless drawing, a magnificent work, its gorgeous colour fresh as the day it was painted, a wonderfully beautiful face. A less striking but very beautiful and finished work is the St. Agnes in the Cathedral of Pisa. These, we in London, can only know by copies and photographs, and the pictures are merely mentioned here because some of their qualities are reflected in a work we can see—the "*Holy Family*," No. 17, in the National Gallery.

But splendid as Andrea's work is, Browning evidently thinks it might, under favourable conditions, have been even still better, and we know how careful Browning was in studying the history of the people he wrote about. His view may be gathered from the following lines. He recognizes the faultless drawing, and he makes del Sarto say of his own work:—

"I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily, too—when I say perfectly,
I do not boast. . . .
At any rate 'tis easy all of it!"

But the bitter cry goes up from him, how much more might he not have done if his beautiful wife had really appreciated his work and helped him lovingly.

"But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,

And the low voice my soul hears as a bird
The fowler's pipe and follows to the snare—
Had you, with these same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
God and the glory! never care for gain."

"That more than perfect mouth," how beautiful it was we may see from the photographs of the Madonna at Florence, and many other pictures, for Andrea painted his wife again and again, and Browning makes him claim that in the future it would be said:—

"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife—
Men will excuse me."

Still, Lucrezia did not influence the painter for good, and the world might have had even more perfect work than the pictures which are known to us. That is the lesson for those whose lives are devoted to tending the suffering and the weary, lives which will sadly fail if they are not filled with tender sympathy.

FLORENCE M. ROBERTS-AUSTEN.

A Book of the Week.

THE LOWELL LETTERS.*

Those who had the privilege of knowing Mr. Lowell personally, looked forward to the publication of his letters as a literary treat of no common occurrence, and they were not disappointed, for the letters conjure up the voice and manner of the American Minister whose courteous sympathy and delightful conversation made him the favourite friend of so many of our English literary men and women.

It has been said of Mr. Lowell that he was born with a perfectly balanced mind by nature, and this rare quality appears in his letters. No one can fail to admire the quiet brave resignation with which he bore the sad loss of his wife and three children; his sorrow never hardened him, it only made him more sympathetic with the trials of his friends, and he never lost that charming touch of genuine humour which made the "*Biglow Papers*" so famous in both his native country, America, and his adopted country, England.

If the letters disappoint the reader in giving so little biographical detail of their author's interesting life, they amply compensate for this by giving to the world Mr. Lowell's opinion upon the great poets and writers of this century. They also contain many charming passages of wit and observation. Speaking of the Slavery Abolitionists, he writes:—

"They treat ideas as ignorant persons do cherries. They think them unwholesome unless they are swallowed stones and all."

He writes of Keats with great enthusiasm, and says of him that he had the finest and richest fancy since Shakespeare; he thinks that lovers of his poems should not deplore his early death, but rather rejoice that we have in his works "an eternal dawn of poesy," for he argues:—

"Whose fulfilment has ever come nigh the glorious greatness of his yet never-balked youth? As we grow older, Art becomes to us a definite faculty instead of a boundless sense of power. Then we felt the wings burst

* "*Letters of James Russell Lowell*," edited by Charles Eliot Norton. Two volumes. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.—1893.)

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