

**NEW GUIDES TO OLD MASTERS.
LONDON: CRITICAL NOTES ON THE
NATIONAL GALLERY AND
THE WALLACE COLLECTION, WITH A
GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND
BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THE SERIES**

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New Guides to Old Masters. London: Critical Notes on the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection, with a General Introduction and Bibliography for the Series by John C. van Dyke

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JOHN C. VAN DYKE

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BY
Charles
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"HISTORY OF PAINTING," "OLD DUTCH AND
FLEMISH MASTERS," ETC.

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PREFACE TO THE SERIES

THERE are numerous guide-books, catalogues, and histories of the European galleries, but, unfortunately for the gallery visitor, they are either wholly descriptive of obvious facts or they are historical and archæological about matters somewhat removed from art itself. In them the gist of a picture—its value or meaning as art—is usually passed over in silence. It seems that there is some need of a guide that shall say less about the well-worn saints and more about the man behind the paint-brush; that shall deal with pictures from the painter's point of view, rather than that of the ecclesiastic, the archæologist, or the literary romancer; that shall have some sense of proportion in the selection and criticism of pictures; that shall have a critical basis for discrimination between the good and the bad; and that shall, for these reasons, be of service to the travelling public as well as to the art student.

This series of guide-books attempts to meet these requirements. They deal only with the so-called "old masters." When the old masters came upon the scene, flourished, and ceased to exist may be determined by their spirit as well as by their dates. In Italy the tradition of the craft had been established before Giotto and was carried on by Benozzo, Botti-

celli, Raphael, Titian, Tintoretto, even down to Tiepolo in the eighteenth century. But the late men, the men of the Decadence, are not mentioned here because of their exaggerated sentiment, their inferior workmanship—in short, the decay of the tradition of the craft. In France the fifteenth-century primitives are considered, and also the sixteenth-century men, including Claude and Poussin; but the work of the Rigauds, Mignards, Coypels, Watteaus, and Bouchers seems of a distinctly modern spirit and does not belong here. This is equally true of all English painting from Hogarth to the present time. In Spain we stop with the School of Velasquez, in Germany and the Low Countries with the seventeenth-century men. The modern painters, down to the present day, so far as they are found in the public galleries of Europe, will perhaps form a separate guide-book, which by its very limitation to modern painting can be better treated by itself.

Only the best pictures among the old masters are chosen for comment. This does not mean, however, that only the great masterpieces have been considered. There are, for instance, notes upon some three hundred pictures in the Venice Academy, upon five hundred in the Uffizi Gallery, and some six hundred in the Louvre or the National Gallery, London. Other galleries are treated in the same proportion. But it has not been thought worth while to delve deeply into the paternity of pictures by third-rate primitives or

to give space to mediocre or ruined examples by even celebrated painters. The merits that now exist in a canvas, and can be seen by any intelligent observer, are the features insisted upon herein.

In giving the relative rank of pictures, a system of starring has been followed.

Mention without a star indicates a picture of merit, otherwise it would not have been selected from the given collection at all.

One star (*) means a picture of more than average importance, whether it be by a great or by a mediocre painter.

Two stars (**) indicates a work of high rank as art, quite regardless of its painter's name, and may be given to a picture attributed to a school or by a painter unknown.

Three stars (***) signifies a great masterpiece.

The length of each note and its general tenor will in most cases suggest the relative importance of the picture.

Catalogues of the galleries should be used in connection with these guide-books, for they contain much information not repeated here. The gallery catalogues are usually arranged alphabetically under the painters' names, although there are some of them that make reference by school, or room, or number, according to the hanging of the pictures in the gallery. But the place where the picture may be hung is constantly shifting; its number, too, may be subject to alteration with each new edition of the catalogue; but its painter's

name is perhaps less liable to change. An arrangement, therefore, by the painters' names placed alphabetically has been necessarily adopted in these guide-books. Usually the prefixes "de," "di," "van," and "von" have been disregarded in the arrangement of the names. And usually, also, the more familiar name of the artist is used—that is, Botticelli, not Filipepi; Correggio, not Allegri; Tintoretto, not Robusti. In practical use the student can ascertain from the picture-frame the name of the painter and turn to it alphabetically in this guide-book. In case the name has been recently changed, he can take the number from the frame and, by turning to the numerical index at the end of each volume, can ascertain the former name and thus the alphabetical place of the note about that particular picture.

The picture appears under the name or attribution given in the catalogue. If there is no catalogue, then the name on the frame is taken. But that does not necessarily mean that the name or attribution is accepted in the notes. Differences of view are given very frequently. It is important that we should know the painter of the picture before us. The question of attribution is very much in the air to-day, and considerable space is devoted to it not only in the General Introduction but in the notes themselves. Occasionally, however, the whole question of authorship is passed over in favour of the beauty of the picture itself. It is always the art of the picture we are seeking, more than its name, or pedigree, or commercial value.