



HANS HOLBEIN PAINTER.

LIFE OF HOLBEIN.

JOHN HOLBEIN, better known by his German name Hans Holbein, a most excellent painter, was born, according to some accounts, at Basil in Switzerland in 1498; but Charles Patin places his birth three years earlier, supposing it very improbable that he could have arrived at such maturity of judgment and perfection in painting, as he shewed in 1514 and 1516, if he had been born so late as 1498. He learned the rudiments of his art from his father John Holbein, who was a painter, and had removed from Augsburg to Basil; but the superiority of his genius soon raised him above his master. He painted our Saviour's Passion in the town-house of Basil;

and in the fish-market of the same town, a Dance of peasants, and Death's dance. These pieces were exceedingly striking to the curious; and Erasmus was so affected with them, that he requested of him to draw his picture, and was ever after his friend. Holbein, in the mean time, though a great genius and fine artist, had no elegance or delicacy of manners, but was given to wine and revelling company; for which he met with the following gentle rebuke from Erasmus. When Erasmus wrote his "*Moriæ Encomium*," or "*Panegyric upon Folly*," he sent a copy of it to Hans Holbein, who was so pleased with the several descriptions of folly there given, that he designed them all in the margin; and where he had not room to draw the whole figures, pasted a piece of paper to the leaves. He then returned the book to Erasmus, who seeing that he had represented an amorous fool by the figure of a fat Dutch lover, hugging his bottle and his lass, wrote under it, "*Hans Holbein*," and so sent it back to the

painter. Holbein, however, to be revenged of him, drew the picture of Erasmus for a musty book-worm, who busied himself in scraping together old MSS. and antiquities, and wrote under it "Adagia."

It is said, that an English nobleman, who accidentally saw some of Holbein's performances at Basil, invited him to come to England, where his art was in high esteem; and promised him great encouragement from Henry VIII.; but Holbein was too much engaged in his pleasures to listen to so advantageous a proposal. A few years after, however, moved by the necessities to which an increased family and his own mismanagement had reduced him, as well as by the persuasions of his friend Erasmus, who told him how improper a country his own was to do justice to his merit, he consented to go to England: and he consented the more readily, as he did not live on the happiest terms with his wife, who is said to have been a termagant. In his journey thither he stayed some days at Stras-

burg, and applying to a very great master in that city for work, was taken in, and ordered to give a specimen of his skill. Holbein finished a piece with great care, and painted a fly upon the most conspicuous part of it; after which he withdrew privily in the absence of his master, and pursued his journey. When the painter returned home, he was astonished at the beauty and elegance of the drawing; and especially at the fly, which, upon his first casting his eye upon it, he so far took for a real fly, that he endeavoured to remove it with his hand. He sent all over the city for his journeyman, who was now missing; but after many enquiries, found that he had been thus deceived by the famous Holbein. This story has been somewhat differently told, as if the painting was a portrait for one of his patrons at Basil, but the effect was the same, for before he was discovered, he had made his escape.

After almost begging his way to England, as Patin tells us, he found an easy admit-

tance to the lord-chancellor, Sir Thomas More, having brought with him Erasmus's picture, and letters recommendatory from him to that great man. Sir Thomas received him with all the joy imaginable, and kept him in his house between two and three years; during which time he drew Sir Thomas's picture, and those of many of his friends and relations. One day Holbein happening to mention the nobleman who had some years ago invited him to England, Sir Thomas was very solicitous to know who he was. Holbein replied, that he had indeed forgot his title, but remembered his face so well, that he thought he could draw his likeness; and this he did so very strongly, that the nobleman, it is said, was immediately known by it. This nobleman, some think, was the Earl of Arundel, others the Earl of Surrey. The Chancellor, having now sufficiently enriched his apartments with Holbein's productions, adopted the following method to introduce him to Henry VIII. He invited the king to an en-

tertainment, and hung up all Holbein's pieces, disposed in the best order, and in the best light, in the great hall of his house. The king, upon his first entrance, was so charmed with the sight of them, that he asked, "Whether such an artist were now alive, and to be had for money?" on which Sir Thomas presented Holbein to the king, who immediately took him into his service, with a salary of 200 florins, and brought him into great esteem with the nobility of the kingdom. The king from time to time manifested the great value he had for him; and upon the death of Queen Jane, his third wife, sent him into Flanders, to draw the picture of the Duchess Dowager of Milan, widow of Francis Sforza, whom the Emperor Charles V. had recommended to him for a fourth wife; but the king's defection from the See of Rome happening about that time, he rather chose to match with a protestant princess. Cromwell, then his prime minister (for Sir Thomas More had been removed, and beheaded), proposed Anne of

Cleves to him ; but the king was not inclined to the match, till her picture, which Holbein had also drawn, was presented to him. There, as Lord Herbert of Cherbury says, she was represented so very charming, that the king immediately resolved to marry her ; and thus Holbein was unwittingly the cause of the ruin of his patron Cromwell, whom the king never forgave for introducing him to Anne of Cleves.

In England Holbein drew a vast number of admirable portraits ; among others, those of Henry VII. and Henry VIII. on the wall of the palace at Whitehall, which perished when it was burnt, though some endeavours were made to remove that part of the wall on which the pictures were drawn. There happened, however, an affair in England, which might have been fatal to Holbein, if the king had not protected him. On the report of his character, a nobleman of the first quality wanted one day to see him, when he was drawing a figure after the life. Holbein,

in answer, begged his lordship to defer the honour of his visit to another day; which the nobleman taking for an affront, came, broke open the door, and very rudely went up stairs. Holbein, hearing a noise, left his chamber; and meeting the lord at his door, fell into a violent passion, and pushed him backwards from the top of the stairs to the bottom. Considering, however, immediately what he had done, he escaped from the tumult he had raised, and made the best of his way to the king. The nobleman, much hurt, though not so much as he pretended, was there soon after him; and upon opening his grievance, the king ordered Holbein to ask pardon for his offence. But this only irritated the nobleman the more, who would not be satisfied with less than his life; upon which the king sternly replied, "My lord, you have not now to do with Holbein, but with me; whatever punishment you may contrive by way of revenge against him, shall assuredly be inflicted upon yourself: remember,

pray, my lord, that I can, whenever I please, make seven lords of seven ploughmen, but I cannot make one Holbein even of seven lords."

We cannot undertake to give a list of Holbein's works, but this may be seen in Walpole's Anecdotes. Soon after the accession of the late king, a noble collection of his drawings was found in a bureau at Kensington, amounting to eighty-nine. These, which are of exquisite merit, have been admirably imitated in engraving, in a work published lately by John Chamberlaine, F. S. A. certainly one of the most splendid books, and most interesting collections of portraits ever executed. Holbein painted equally well in oil, water-colours, and distemper, in large and in miniature: but he had never practised the art of painting in miniature, till he resided in England, and learned it from Lucas Corneli; though he afterwards carried it to its highest perfection. His paintings of that kind have all the force of oil-colours, and are

finished with the utmost delicacy. In general, he painted on a green ground, but in his small pictures frequently he painted on a blue. The invention of Holbein was surprisingly fruitful, and often poetical; his execution was remarkably quick, and his application indefatigable. His pencil was exceedingly delicate; his colouring had a wonderful degree of force; he finished his pictures with exquisite neatness; and his carnations were life itself. His genuine works are always distinguishable by the true, round, lively imitation of flesh, visible in all his portraits, and also by the amazing delicacy of his finishing.

It is observed by most authors, that Holbein always painted with his left hand; though Walpole objects against that tradition, (what he considers as a proof), that in a portrait of Holbein painted by himself, which was in the Arundelian collection, he is represented holding the pencil in the right hand. But that evidence cannot be sufficient to set aside so general a testimony of the most authentic

writers on this subject: because, although habit and practice might enable him to handle the pencil familiarly with his left hand, yet, as it is so unusual, it must have had but an unseemly and awkward appearance in a picture; which probably might have been his real inducement for representing himself without such a particularity. Besides, the writer of Holbein's life, at the end of the treatise by De Piles, mentions a print by Hollar, still extant, which describes Holbein drawing with his left hand. Nor is it so extraordinary or incredible a circumstance; for other artists are remarked for the very same habit; particularly Mozzo of Antwerp, who worked with the left; and Amico Aspertino, as well as Ludovico Cangiagio, who worked equally well with both hands. This great artist died of the plague at London in 1554; some think at his lodgings in Whitehall, where he had lived from the time that the king became his patron, but Vertue rather thought at the Duke of Nor-

folk's house, in the priory of Christ church near Aldgate, then called Duke's-place. Strype says that he was buried in St. Catherine Cree church ; but this seems doubtful.