

**A** LITTLE Babe with a sweetly infantile, infinitely tender and trusting face — yet a face plump, chubby and baby-like, with small red lips, sometimes a dimpled chin, and eyes that glow with heaven's own blue.

This is the face that has peered through the clouds of time for many hundreds of years and has had a more potent influence upon history, religion and art than the face of any other child that ever lived.

A little Babe nestling close to the breast of its beautiful Mother, or sometimes fondling a little playmate at the Mother's knee. A Babe that is the incarnation of love, gentleness and serene trust.

This is the Child-Christ of the artists — a Babe whose features vary, but whose divine expression of world-love and world-peace prevails and endures. No figure has

# Infant Christ as pictured by the artist



ing rose. How rose-white His face, glorified by its halo, seems!

Because of the works of artists like these, lofty conceptions of the Christ-Child are found in so many homes and nurseries at this season of the year.

You little children, in whose eyes Undimmed the light of heaven glows, Whose dreams are bright with Paradise, Whose souls are whiter than the snows, From holy lips and undented, Breathe your soft prayer to Christ the Child.

Possibly, when Christina Rossetti, in her poem, asked, "If thou art He we sought for patiently, where is Thy court?" she had in mind these paintings of the Child, who is usually presented with the simplest surroundings.

Most of the painters present the Mother and Child with some intensely human touch. Sometimes the Mother sits with the Child on her knee, fields and forests rising in the background. There were so many of these idyllic presentations that a school grew up and the paintings were known as "pastoral Madonnas."

### A PASTORAL TYPE

Observe, for instance, Fra Filippo Lippi's painting of the adoring Mother, which is typical of its school. Here the Mother sits, with folded hands, eyes downcast in adoration, while the Babe—most baby-like and chubby—climbers toward her, not seeking adoration, perhaps, so much as a human kiss. In the distance extend fields and valleys with winding rivers and rocky hills.

This painting closely resembles some of Botticelli's, Lippi's master. In Botticelli's famous painting in the Louvre there is a background of palms waving against a sunset sky.

One of the most beautiful pictures where the Mother and Child sit enthroned is that of Bouguereau. Here the Virgin sits upon a throne, her fingers placed on her cheek, while she seems lost in deep abstraction—perhaps foreseeing the terrible days to come when the lovely, golden-haired child on her knee will be led to crucifixion.

Apparently innocent of all pain, the Child seizes the boy John and tenderly kisses him. It is a wonder-work depicting childish friendship and affection. There is the throne, it is true, but the two children are human.

Bellini became famous because of his en-



Madonna Nursing Infant Christ (Lippi 1402-1469)

ever so impressed itself upon art as that of the Child Jesus—the marvelous Baby Boy of Bethlehem.

Lord babe, if Thou art He We sought for patiently, Where is Thy court? Either may prophecy and star resort; Men heed not their report. Men bow down and worship, righteous man, This infant of a span. Is He man sought for since the world began. Thee, Lord, accept my gold, too base a thing For Thee, of all kings King. —Christina G. Rossetti.

**B**EFORE the Babe who nestled in swaddling clothes in the old stable near the Bethlehem inn the great lords of art have knelt and worshipped; to His service they have devoted their best talents and done magic with brush and color.

Their pictures of the wonderful Child differ. Yet before each painter was the ideal of the infant Saviour; a Child whose spirit was humility, who was born in a manger and destined to be reared amid great poverty; a Child possessing the tenderest of natures, knowing no moods of ill temper, loving His mother with an unbounded affection, old beyond His years and knowing, ere He spoke, the mysteries of all ages, and the sorrows and joys of all time.

To delineate Him in warm colors, with reverence welling in their hearts, the great men of art turned their brush—Michelangelo, Murillo, Raphael, Guido Reni, Bellini, Perugino, Veronese, Fra Angelico, Moretto, Bouguereau, Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Filippo Lippi, Correggio, Titian, Durer, Bodenhausen and others.

Their paintings of the Babe of Bethlehem stand among their masterpieces. These pictures tell the world-story of motherhood and childhood—the greatest, purest love story of the ages.

The love and unselfish devotion of the Mother, as exemplified by the Blessed Mary, and the intense, clinging affection of the Child Jesus present an idealization of the deepest emotions, the truest and most potent instincts in man. One does not wonder that the great artists painted the childish face as though the work were a religious rite.

Marvelously ethereal is the wonderful Child of Murillo in his "Holy Family"—the Child just emerging from babyhood, His face upraised in the ecstasy that angels know, an inner glory



Virgin, Infant Jesus, and St. John (Bouguereau)

transfiguring the face! It is a striking study that Raphael gives in his Christ-Child, in that cherubic infant, resting on clouds and raising his tiny baby hands in half playful admonition. Clinging fondness is shown in Botticelli's painting of the Virgin, the Infant Jesus and St. John, in which the golden-haired Jesus clings to His Mother like a clamber-



Madonna with Child Jesus (Dolci 1616-1686)

throned Madonnas. In one of his famous paintings he presents a pensive Mother, with the Babe resting upon her right arm and looking at the world with childish wonder. In the Mother's face one reads that gentleness and fondness which makes motherhood so beautiful. The Child toys with something, but shows little interest in His toy. Possibly He feels a sense of suffering in the world! His mood, like His Mother's, seems contemplative.

Among the pictures presenting a playful Child few are more admired than that of Dolci. There are joy and merriment in the little body springing from the young Mother's hands with arm upraised, face alight, and eyes sparkling. Here the Mother is young and beautiful, yet suffering has given a somber gravity to the meditative face, strangely contrasting with the joyous dancing Babe.

### MODERNS DISCARD HALOS

Modern painters no longer paint the Mother and Child surrounded by saints, or reposing on thrones of clouds; their depictions of ideal motherhood, represented in Mary and the Child Jesus, are almost photographic.

One of the earliest painters of the unhaloed figures was Gabriel Max. The painting is simple. It marks an extreme from the over-decorated Florentine school; a Mother most human, and a childlike Child.

The picture is restful. The Mother is young and fair, a virgin-lily of womanhood. The Child is tender, fragile, nestling like a bird close to the Mother's breast, his large, dark eyes filled with peace and content.

This is the final and most simple conception of the Child in art. The surrounding angels have flown away. The halos have melted in the glory of a natural day. The thrones and pillars of clouds have disappeared. And the simple, human little Child smiles at you—just as He smiled in Bethlehem and Nazareth nineteen hundred years ago.