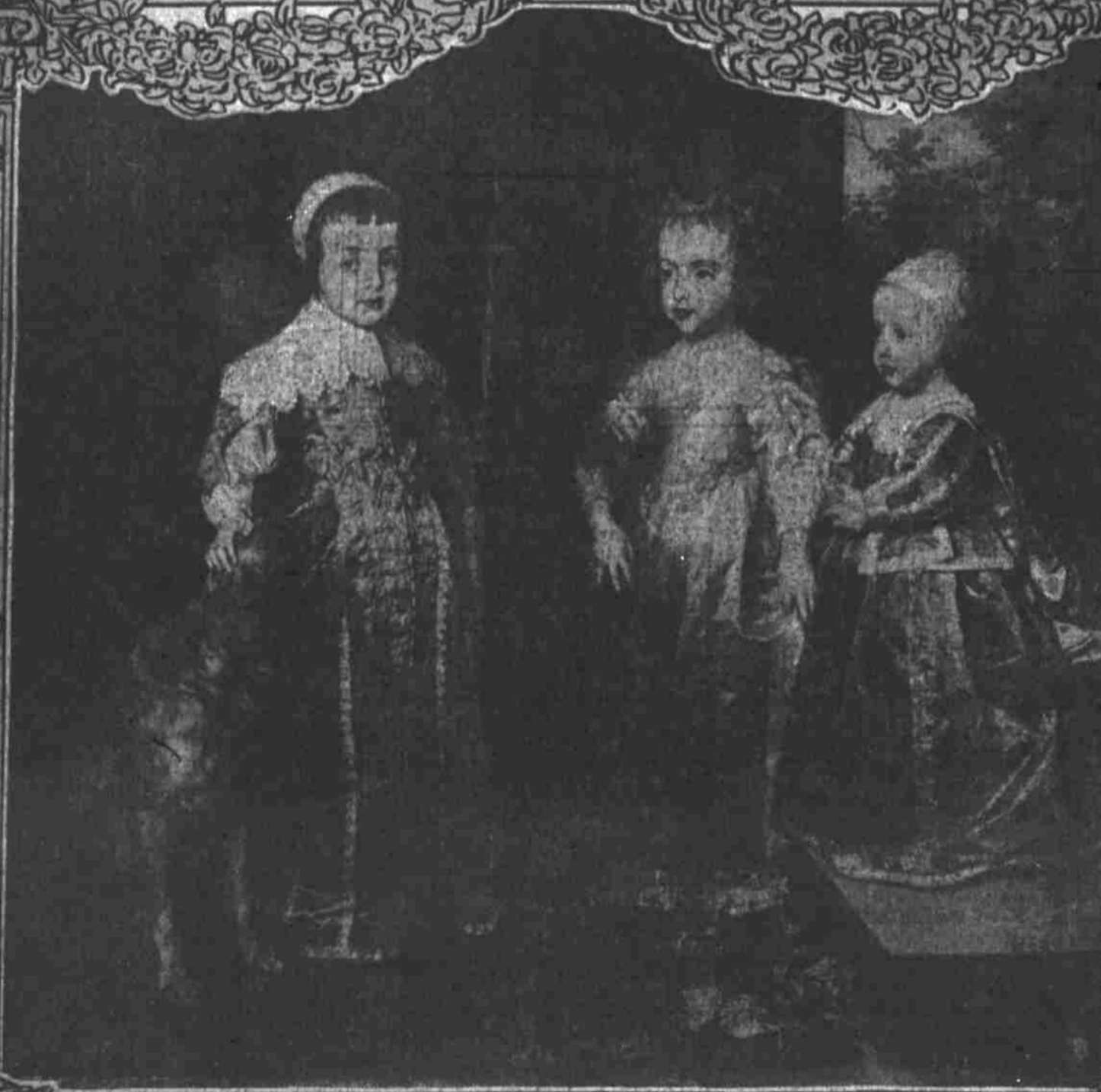


MASTERPIECES that HAVE MOLDED ARTISTIC TASTE Van Dyck



The Children of Charles I.



The Virgin of Gifts.



Young Man with a Dog.



Portrait of Charles I.

WHEN the great Gainsborough was dying he managed to smile and make one of those appropriate ante-mortem remarks which the Japanese have elevated into a cult of ante-mortem poetry. Gainsborough's observation was:

"Well, we are all going to heaven; and Van Dyck is of the company."

It was at once a ruling passion strong in death and a formal, solemn attestation by one of England's masters that Van Dyck

was of the most venerated in the craft. It would be hard to find many artists who have so extensively, and so vitally, affected the work of other painters, and perhaps impossible to find any one who, so hugely as Van Dyck, has ever affected the art of British painters.

If he were known as a "master of British painters" the phrase would not be altogether extravagant. At least one great school arose in the train of his brilliant work, with leaders who today are rated masters in their art.

CRITICISM has been fond of comparing him with Rubens, as literature tries, instinctively, to weigh a Dickens against a Thackeray. Such contrasts, as a rule, are wasted pains, because wherever art finds a man big enough to earn them he possesses an individuality superior to them.

Van Dyck quit the painter, in whose studio he had gone far, to swell the throng of worshipping devotees under the distinguished Rubens.

One day Rubens abandoned, in an artist's weariness, the canvases on his easel. The students gradually mustered courage to enter the open studio, jostling one another at last in their eagerness to secure stolen glimpses of the famous painter's method. In the crush Van Dyck fell against the picture and smeared a section of it.

Horror seized on his companions. They knew not what condign punishment awaited them. Their terror made them desperately bold. Could not some one among them try to restore the master's work? They all turned to Van Dyck. He, with no fear whatever, took up the brushes and restored the injured details.

Rubens did not return until the following morning. He drew his students about him, as he often did, to explain to them technique from his own manner of work, and he selected the portion Van Dyck had painted as the one he was most proud of.

IMITATED HIS MASTER

It was Rubens who first, beyond the boundaries of Italy, converted his studio into a wholesale picture-making place, where the overwhelming commissions that poured in were not executed by him alone, but by assistants who supplemented him at various stages in the picture's growth. Van Dyck was his most brilliant aid, and it has always been accounted a critical task of the utmost difficulty to distinguish between the canvases of the two marvelous Flemish painters during that period.

Van Dyck became painter in the court of Charles I by special invitation of that art and pleasure loving monarch.

Most popular among his works that have descended to the admiration of posterity are the portrait of his royal patron, with horse and groom near by, and the charming group of the children of Charles. Yet the same vivid appreciation of the possibilities of color are apparent in the well-known "Young Man With a Dog," and the realistic imagination which was his conspicuous trait displays itself in another canvas belonging to the religious class, entitled "The Virgin of Gifts."

When, after spending his income in the most lavish manner, he died in the early forties, he left behind him a cult, including the foremost painters, who boasted of following his best traditions. Sir Peter Lely and Sir Geoffrey Kneller were his leaders, while countless minor painters devoted themselves to emulation of his achievements as though he had been the one artist of all time.

As time has gone by his position has left him niched in his fame and deemed well worthy of study as part of the modern artist's education. And that, perhaps, is the just position belonging to every master in the evolution of any art.