PORTRAITS OF JUDGES IN THE GUILDHALL.

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There is a chapter in the history of British Art in which the Corporation of the City of London played a conspicuous part that has not been sufficiently dwelt upon. From the earliest times the citizens of London were distinguished patrons of Art, and employed it freely on all occasions of pageantry and rejoicing: but at the period to which this paper chiefly refers it was connected with a still higher feeling—that of *Gratitude*. Gratitude for deliverance from a scourge, and gratitude for assistance rendered to themselves by Gentlemen of the Long Robe.

On the 2nd of September, 1666, broke out the terrible conflagration known in history as the Great Fire of London. This calamity, notwithstanding the immense loss and devastation of property involved in it, was the cause of one very great blessing. It put for ever an end to that periodically dreaded scourge the Plague, which had just culminated in the great Plague of 1665. This led to the employment by the grateful citizens of two distinct forms of the Fine Arts; one, that of *Architecture* to commemorate deliverance, and the other of *Painting*, in recognition of the disinterested generosity which they had experienced.

First, the Monument on Fish Street Hill was erected by Sir Christopher Wren (pursuant to Act of Parliament, 1667), between the years 1671 and 1677 at a cost of £13,700, and is 202 feet in height.

An inscription on the south side of the base of the pedestal of the Monument states how Charles II. remitted taxes, and refers to the petition of the magistrates and inhabitants to Parliament, who immediately passed an

Act that public works should be restored with public money, to be raised by an impost on coals, and "caused this Column to be erected."

In the general conflagration most of the ancient boundaries of property were effaced, and lawlessness threatened everywhere to prevail. Disputes on all sides seemed inevitable, when, by the timely intervention of the Government and the gratuitously rendered assistance of the Judges, all these troubles were, as might be said, miraculously averted.

After the fire a special Court was constituted by Act of Parliament (8th February, 1666-67), consisting of the "Justices of the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas, and Barons of the Exchequer (or any three of them) to adjudicate on all questions arising between the owners and tenants of property in the City destroyed by fire.

The Commission sat at Clifford's Inn, an Inn of Chancery belonging to the Inner Temple, adjoining St. Dunstan's Church. In the hall of this Inn, Sir Matthew Hale and the principal Judges met, and dispatched a vast amount of business.

Sir Matthew Hale was the first that offered his services to the City, and this measure certainly obviated numerous difficulties that would otherwise have occurred, insomuch that the sudden and quiet building of the City, which is justly to be reckoned among the wonders of the age, is in no small measure due to the great care which he and Sir Orlando Bridgeman, then Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, exercised, and to the judgment they shewed in that affair.

The last sitting held by the Commission was on the 20th September, 1672.

Besides his part in the strictly judical business of this tribunal, Hale is said to have advised the Corporation on various matters relating to the rebuilding of the City.

There were no less than twenty-two of the Judges constantly occupied in adjusting and determining the various disputes and claims which were put forth from day to day.

After this deliverance the Corporation of the City of London desired to put on lasting record its sense of the labour and trouble incurred by the Judges at these sittings

without the expense of law suits, and in the year 1670, on the 19th of April, the Court passed a resolution as follows:

1670. Resolved, This Court in contemplation of the favour and kindness of the Rt. Honble. Sir Orlando Bridgman Knt. and Bart. Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England, the Justices of the King's Bench and Common Pleas and Barons of the Exchequer, to the State of the Citty, in and about the Act of Parliament and the execution of it for erecting a Judicature for determining of differences between Landlord and tenant, doth think fit and order that their pictures be taken by a skillful hand and kept in some publique place of this Citty for a grateful memoriall of their good office.

Rep. 75 fol. 160 b.

It was at first proposed to entrust Sir Peter Lely with the execution of these portraits, but as he declined to wait upon the Judges at their respective chambers, the scheme was abandoned.

A Committee was therefore appointed on the 27th September, 1670, for the purpose of considering the various tenders that had been invited to be sent in.

(Repertory 3, fol. 20.)

The result was that from among the various "skilful masters" who competed for the work, a certain Michael Wright was selected, and he was paid from the funds of the Corporation at the price of £36 (?) for each portrait (Walpole says £60). The arms and inscriptions on the frames were painted by his brother, Jeremiah Wright. These pictures were placed in the Great Hall. In the year 1672 many of them had to be repaired in consequence of injuries caused by the shrinking of unseasoned wood fastened behind them.

The order for these reparations was dated 29th August of the same year.

Portraits of the King and the Duke of York were also added to the series by the same Committee in the September following, and for these two pictures Sir Peter Lely received the sum of £100.

An early reference to these pictures when placed in the Hall, occurs in the Diary of John Evelyn, under date July 31st, 1673, he writes :—

I went to see the pictures of all the judges and eminent men of the Long Robe, newly painted by Mr. Wright, and set up in Guildhall costing the City £1000.

Most of them are very like the persons they represent, though I never took Wright to be any considerable artist.

Compare this with an earlier entry in the Diary 1659, April 5th.

"Came the Earl of Northampton and the *famous painter Mr. Wright* to visit me."

(Evelyn's Works, Bohn's edition, vol. i., page 343.)

An account of London belonging to the date 1731, contains a reference to these pictures, and describes their position on the walls of the Great Hall. The description runs thus:—

The Hall is embellished with the portraitures painted in full proportion, of *eighteen* Judges, which were there put up by the City in gratitude for their signal service done in determining the differences between landlord and tenant (without the expense of lawsuits) in rebuilding this City, pursuant to an Act of Parliament, after the Fire in 1666.

In the Lord Mayor's Court were four more, all in scarlet robes as Judges.

In the magnificent folio volume of Mr. John Edwd. Price is introduced an old engraving of 1708, showing this Hall with a flat roof, Gog and Magog, and the pictures of the Judges.

Dodsley's "London and its Environs," published in 1761, gives a description of the Hall borrowed from the foregoing account of 1731. The pictures continued to remain there as represented in various successive paintings.

On the erection of the Courts of Law, the Court of Common Pleas and the Court of Queen's Bench, on the site of the old Guild Hall Chapel and Blackwell Hall in the year 1823, the portraits were transferred to those walls as a more appropriate locality, and I first saw them there in November, 1867.

When, in turn, these Law Courts were demolished and the magnificent permanent Gallery of Art was established on this site, the greater part of these portraits were removed to the old Council Chamber, the apartment in which we are now assembled. Until the construction of the permanent Art Gallery, this Council Chamber had been the chief centre for the display of all those grand historical pictures, and portraits of eminent public characters, in which the Corporation of London is so rich As this apartment is now frequently used as a Court. of Justice, the Judges' portraits are still most appro-

priately located, and I am glad to perceive that they have once more undergone careful cleaning and renovation.

It is now perhaps time that we should turn to the history of the pictures themselves, with their peculiar significance for portraiture. They afford a signal example of Art being employed as an expression of gratitude by a great public body, and may be regarded as the commencement of that development of patronage of the Fine Arts, especially native Art, for which the Corporation of London is so distinguished.

It is not a little remarkable that the first painter applied to for the purpose of carrying out this scheme was a foreigner. Sir Peter Lely, the Dutchman, stood foremost among portrait painters in England, and enjoyed largely the patronage of the Crown and of persons of the highest cultivation.

At the time of the Restoration, most of the favourite artists, like Lely, were of foreign birth and education, but there still existed a few practitioners of English origin, and their productions in a quieter way were highly esteemed.

As, after Sir Peter Lely declined to accede to the wishes of the Council, the work was put up to competition and tenders were invited, it would be interesting, if by reference to existing records, the names of those who desired to enter the lists could be ascertained. We know at least that the following artists were English born, and that they were frequently employed by persons of distinction—

Isaac Fuller, died in Bloomsbury Square, 1672.

Robert Streater, born in Covent Garden, 1624. Died, 1680.

John Greenhill, born at Salisbury, 1649. Died, 1676.

Davenport, an imitator of Lely, died in Salisbury Court in the reign of King William, aged 50.

Parry Walton, died 1700.

Thos. Flatman, born in Aldersgate Street. Died, December, 1688.

John Hayls, the friend of Pepys. Died in Southampton Street, Bloomsbury, 1679, and was buried in St. Martin's.

Edmund Ashfield was a pupil of Wright; he has no dates.

Joseph Michael Wright, the successful candidate, was born in Scotland, but came to London at the age of sixteen or

seventeen. He generally signed his pictures; sometimes as *Anglus* and sometimes *Scotus*. The earliest date which I have met with on his pictures is on a small three-quarter of Mrs. Cleypole, daughter of Oliver Cromwell, giving the year of her death 1658. This picture is in the possession of the Earl of Chichester, at Stanmer. Another portrait by him at Ham House of Colonel Russell is dated 1659. Two other portraits in the Madingley Collection, Cambridge, bear date 1660. All these pictures are signed *Ios Mich Ritus*, in full dark letters. His later and more important works were signed by him with his name in full, spelt in the ordinary way, *on the back of the canvas*. The only picture signed by him in full on the front of the canvas is that of John Lacy, the Actor, at Hampton Court, dated 1675, painted for Charles II. It runs "*Mich Wright Pincit 1675*," in yellow letters upon dark ground in the right-hand corner.

The practice adopted by some painters of writing their names on the back of their canvases is most dangerous, so far as the intention of perpetuating their names is concerned. When in course of time a painting grows old, and the canvas becomes rotten or worn away, it is necessary to have it strengthened with a new piece of canvas fastened to the back, so that anything already drawn or written behind gets covered up. Careful cleaners or restorers under these circumstances make faithful copies first of what they find remaining and reproduce them. But it is not so in all instances, and sometimes through ignorance and carelessness, the name of the painter gets distorted if not entirely lost.

A practical instance of this mischief occurred at the National Portrait Gallery many years ago. The Gallery acquired a very fine portrait of Thomas Hobbes, the Philosopher, painted, as it appeared, by an unknown artist named *Wrilps*. On the back we found coarsely written—

Jos Wick Wrilps Londiensis (*sic*)
Pictor Caroli 2nd Regis pinxit
Aetat 81, 1669.

I perceived that the canvas was much newer than the painting, and from the clumsiness of the spelling felt sure that the transcriber had been very careless over his work. Fortunately we succeeded by the help of a very dexterous

manipulator in detaching the added canvas from the original back, when we read in smaller and beautifully formed letters, as follows—

Jo^s Mich : Writus Londinens
Pictor Caroli 2^di Regis pinxit.

Samuel Pepys in his diary makes only one reference to Wright, and that occurs under date June 18th, 1662. He expatiates on the beauty of the portraits of the King and Duchess of York, by Lely, and describes them as "most rare things," which he had just seen. He then adds—

"Thence to Wright's, the painter's; but Lord! to see the difference that is between their two works"!

Of Wright's personal history very little is known. There is no record of the name of his instructor, or of the date of his appointment as Painter to the King, but he went in early days to Italy and studied there and returned with the character of an accomplished connoisseur. His works always show a tendency to classical severity. John Evelyn says that he had been long in Italy. Wright attended Roger Palmer, Earl of Castlemaine on his embassy to Rome, from James II. to the Pope (Innocent XI.) and published an account of it afterwards. The date of the dedication was 1687.

Wright appears in a full-length picture of the earl, seated at a table, as his secretary.[1] Wright appears to have been a linguist. His son remained in Rome and was master of languages.

Wright had a choice collection of works of art. He died in James street, Covent Garden about 1700, and was buried in that church.

When I first saw these portraits of the Judges in the Guildhall Law Courts, November, 1867, I was informed that they were signed in full on the back of the canvas. As at that time they hung very high on the walls and were very difficult of access there was no means of verifying the statement. Recently, 7th July, 1893, I have enjoyed the privilege of seeing three of the portraits taken down

[1] See Catalogue of the 1866 Exhibition of Portraits at South Kensington, No. 1015, "The Earl of Castlemain dictating to his Secretary." Lent by the Earl of Powis.

from the walls and of examining the state of the canvas at the back.

The following were the inscriptions as I came upon them—

Sir Timothy Littleton (sic) Knight
one of the Barons of the Exchequer
Jo^s Mich Wright
Pinxit Anno Domi 1671.

written in black paint in the left-hand lower part of the back of the canvas which has been relined, and the writing consequently copied from something underneath.

On the back of the second I found on what seemed to be the original writing in smaller and sharper letters on the old canvas.

Sir Thomas Tyrrell Knight one of the
Judges of the Common Pleas
Jo : (sic) Wright Pinxit 1671.
J. R. Restauravit 1779.

The third was also on old canvas and in old writing, ran thus

Sir Francis North Knight Lord Cheif Justice
of the Common Pleas
Jo. Mich Wright Lon. Pinxit 1675
S. R. Restauravit 1779.

We do not read on either of these examples " Pictor Regis " or painter to the King, a post which, according to his portrait of Thomas Hobbes now in the National Portrait Gallery, he held in 1669.

The additional lines to the Tyrrell and North portraits, recording their subsequent restoration, derives explanation from the pages of Malcolm's Londinium Redivivum, published in 1803. He states, in accordance with Walpole, that Wright received £60 for each portrait, and proceeds to quote the following passage from Mr. Nichols' publication, printed in 1783, intituled " London's Gratitude," at page 19—

When Guildhall was repaired in 1779, all the portraits (except the modern ones) were in so bad a condition that it became a matter of doubt whether they were to be restored to their places or committed to the flames. The Committee of City Lands, who were to decide their fate, divided equally on the question, and it was to the honour of the Chairman, Mr. Alderman Townsend, whose vote determined their being cleaned and replaced.

The name of the Restorer, "J. R.," is not revealed, Mr. Malcolm himself in 1803, adds—

> The constant exposure to which every article in the Hall is liable, of damp in winter and dust in summer, with a constant and fresh supply of smoke, condensed in this very centre of the city, accounts for the deplorable state of the paintings in 1779. Indeed, they are almost reduced to the same pitiable condition again (24 years later). This circumstance, their extreme height, and the similarity of red robes and monstrous wigs, prevent a possibility of description without fatiguing the reader.

Thus we see that these pictures, notwithstanding the honourable purpose for which they were painted, have had their vicissitudes. But it is highly satisfactory to see the excellent care with which they are now treated, and the brilliancy of their present condition as they hang on these venerable walls.

A series of twenty-two portraits, all life-size, full-length, and all standing wearing the same official scarlet gowns, could scarcely be other than monotonous. The massive frames, of a uniform deep rich brown colour, of the well-known Sunderland pattern (so called from the prevalence of that fashion at Althorp) impart a heaviness and dulness of tone. The backgrounds are all, with the exception of Sir Matthew Hale and Chief Baron Atkyns, perfectly plain dark brown, with a shallow arch above each figure. The floor, in all cases, is a dark plain brown and so deep in colour that the black shoes, where the feet are shown, can scarcely be distinguished, no carpet or inlaid pavement is introduced. Not one figure is seated, and no face appears in profile. There may truly be said to be no great variety of attitude among them, so far as arms are concerned. But the hands, are well placed, and the action of the fingers, for the most part, significant.

The manner of painting is broad and large as if intended to be seen at a great distance. But, as the result of frequent cleaning and repairing in former times, very little of the original manipulation of Wright remains to be seen. The names and coats of arms conspicuously attached to the frames convey ready information, and it is much to be desired that all portraits in public galleries were equally well provided.

Sir Matthew Hale's is an important picture. A full-length life-sized figure in scarlet robe and fur mantle, standing on a step with a balustrade behind him. His face is turned in three-quarters to the left, with eyes fixed on the spectator. He wears a close-fitting black skull-cap, and carries his square-topped hat with a roll of paper in his right hand. The thumb of his left hand is placed within the narrow black girdle which encircles his waist. He wears a gold chain of SS. over his shoulders, bearing in the centre below a portcullis.

This chain like others in the series, is very coarsely painted.

The collar fitting close to his cheek is plain, flat, and square-cut. This fashion is uniformly adopted. At this date, 1671, the ruff has been entirely abandoned. There is not one example in the series.

His large black and gold embroidered glove is tucked within his girdle on his right side.

A repetition of this picture, but only half-length, attributed also to Joseph Michael Wright, was lent by Lincoln's Inn to the Great Portrait Exhibition of 1866, No. 918 of the Catalogue. It is engraved in Lodge's Portraits, vol. vii., plate 152.

Most of the Judges, in this series, wear or carry large gloves. Some are plain white leather, and others are of black with gold borders or fringes to them.

Lord Chief Baron Robert Atkyns, K.B., exhibits long dark hair with a more youthful countenance than any of the other Judges. He wears a gold chain and holds a square flat-topped cap in his left hand and carries a glove in his right. Light is admitted from the right-hand side. Beside him, to the left, is a group of papers and an official robe. These are the only accessories, excepting the balustrade of Sir Matt. Hale, introduced in the series.

PRESENT DISTRIBUTION OF THE PORTRAITS OF THE JUDGES AT GUILDHALL.

In the Old Council Chamber.

North side.

Sir John Kelynge, Knt. Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Died 1671.

Sir Edward Turnour, Knt.
Speaker of the House of Commons till 1671, when he became Chief Baron of the Exchequer. Died 1676.

Heneage Finch, Earl of Nottingham.
Solicitor-General, Lord Chancellor 1675. Died 1682.

Sir Thomas Twisden, Bart.
Judge of the King's Bench. Died 1683.

East side.

Sir Christopher Turnor, Knt.
Third Baron of the Exchequer Died 1675.

Sir Robert Atkyns, Knt.
Lord Chief Baron. Died 1710.

South side.

Sir John Vaughan, Knt.
Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. Died 1674.

Sir Matthew Hale, Knt.
Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Died 1676.

Sir Richard Rainsford.
Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Died 1679.

Sir William Morton, Knt.
Judge of the King's Bench. Died, 1672.

West side.

Sir William Wadham Wyndham, Knt.
Judge of the King's Bench. Died 1668.

Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Knt. and Bart.
Chief Justice in the Court of Common Pleas, and Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. Died 1674.

Sir Hugh Wyndham, Baron of the Exchequer and Judge of the Common Pleas. Died 1684.

IN LORD MAYOR'S COURT, REGISTRAR'S OFFICE.

Sir Willm. Wylde, Knt.
Judge of Court of Common Pleas. Died 1679.

Sir Edward Thurland, Knt.
A Baron of the Exchequer. Died 1682.

Francis North.
Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, 1675, afterwards Lord Keeper and Baron Guilford. Died 1685.

Sir Thomas Tyrrell, Knt.
Justice of the Common Pleas. Died 1672.

Sir Edward Atkyns, Knt.
Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer. Died 1698.

Sir Timothy Lyttelton, painted in 1671. A Welsh Judge.
Baron of the Exchequer 1670. Died 1679.

Sir Samuel Brown, Knt.
A Judge of the Common Pleas. Died 1668.

Sir John Archer.
Judge of the Common Pleas. Died 1682.

Sir William Ellis, Knt.
Judge of the Common Pleas. Died 1680.