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### RED CROSS SARGENTS.

#### PAINTINGS FOR CHARITY.

By A. C. R. CARTER.

Not far away from Edwin Abbey's mighty frieze at Boston of the "Quest of the Holy Grail," is Sargent's equally inspired "Redemption," with its holy symbols of sacrifice, along with the side-niches of his great "Ancilla Domini" and the "Mater Dolorosa." To remember these is to know why Sargent, having made the vow of renunciation in 1914 never to paint another portrait, eventually broke it at the call of the Red Cross. Memories are short in these days, so that the chivalrous story is worth retelling. It begins with those regrettable political activities only a few months before the war, when not only was the Velazquez Venus in the National Gallery maltreated, but the Sargent portrait of Henry James in the Academy did not escape emotional damage.

Sargent was deeply moved. He found some relief in the fact that the outrage had not happened the year before, when his beautiful portrait of a little child—"Rose-Marie"—was at Burlington House. This, indeed, he had determined should be his last portrait. He yielded, however, to the American call for a Henry James presentment, and he had also promised Lord Curzon and another old friend that he would finish their portraits. After that he vowed to himself a farewell from his famous form of practice.

Then came the war, and, in the early part of 1915, when no man could resist what Edmund Burke once described as "the healing voice of Charity," came, too, the Red Cross call for succour by acts and deeds. Shining among the general works of willingness was the series of Red Cross art sales begun at Christie's. One of the earliest features was the offer by many a distinguished artist to execute a portrait of the highest bidder for a blank canvas or an empty sheet of paper.

#### A £10,000 PORTRAIT.

Remembering his vow, Sargent at first hesitated, and put his name down, not for a canvas to be painted, but for two sheets to be filled with chalk portraits. On April 16, 1915, these were potent enough to bring 1,150gs. But in the meantime a friend of Sargent and of Sir Hugh Lane (who was waiting to return from New York) had been busy for the cause. On April 27, 1915, there was a dramatic dénouement.

At the end of a stirring day's sale Mr. Lance Hannen, Christie's senior partner, stated that it was his high privilege to mention that, although Mr. Sargent had deliberately forsaken the field of portraiture and had registered a vow never to paint another portrait, he had been so moved by the appeal of the Red Cross that he would cheerfully pick up his brush again for the sake of the sick and wounded British soldier. He had not been able to say "No" to the cabled invitation of Sir Hugh Lane, who had made the offer of £10,000 to him to paint a full-length portrait, the fee to be paid to the Red Cross. Moreover, Sir Hugh Lane was ready to make way for any other champion of the Red Cross throwing down a weightier challenge.

Nearly ten years have passed, but those who were present will never forget the scene, neither will the world cease to remember the tragedy ten days later when the Lusitania went down with Lane among the victims. But the Red Cross did not suffer, for on May 21, 1917, the executors of Lane handed over £10,000, and Mr. Sargent proceeded to paint the portrait of the eminent public personality chosen—President Wilson. This was duly exhibited in the 1919 Academy, and is now in the National Gallery of Ireland, to which Lane had bequeathed his own portrait painted by Sargent.

#### A SECOND PICTURE FOR CHARITY.

The example of Lane's devotion and Sargent's sacrifice was not lost. In the fourth and last series of Red Cross sales at Christie's, 1918, the further heartening announcement was made that Mr. Perceval Duxbury, of Bury, had succeeded in persuading the great artist again to paint a portrait on behalf of the cause at the similar high fee of £10,000. This portrait—of Mrs. Duxbury and her daughter—was also shown in the 1919 Academy. It was on the last day of the Red Cross sale in 1918 (April 28), that this second Sargent commission was made public, and on the same afternoon the late Mr. Henry Duveen—uncle of Sir Joseph Duveen, at whose expense the Sargent gallery at Millbank is being erected—not to be outdone, cabled from New York another £10,000 to be added to the Red Cross total.

Some day, perhaps, it may be deemed interesting to collect all these Red Cross portraits and exhibit them together. In addition to the two Sargents, there would be paintings by other generous artists such as O. Birley, Hon. John Collier, Sir Frank Dicksee, Sir James Guthrie,

one all sparkling colour and youthful, elastic movement; the other heavier and more deliberate.

A portrait of one of the sons, unfinished for the reason that the sitter died while it was still in progress, is somewhat rigid and pompous in attitude. Of a touching spirituality altogether exceptional in Mr. Sargent's oeuvre is the three-quarter length "Alfred, son of Asher Wertheimer." This son, too, if memory serves, predeceased his father. Most expressive is here the quiet concentration of the whole figure, the lofty sadness of the expression, the indefinable premonition of tragedy. The portrait fantasy which would probably obtain the greatest number of votes from the general public would be "Almina," the likeness of a young lady of adorable freshness and charm, wearing a pseudo-Oriental dress, and seated in an Oriental attitude. But the general public would in this instance be mistaken; this is the only thin, poor piece of work in the whole series of portraits. The inspiration, such as it is, has been derived from Sir Joshua Reynolds, but no comparison of the two masters on this ground is possible.

#### WORK OF SUBTLE BEAUTY.

A masterpiece of art, and, indeed, the most pathetic portrait in the collection, is the "Mrs. Asher Wertheimer." Dressed all in black, and placed in a sombre environment, Mrs. Wertheimer appears in an attitude of perfect simplicity, unconscious of the spectator's scrutiny. The beauty of the work is of so subtle a kind that it can hardly be put into words; the artist will reveal in it as a technical achievement, the student of humanity will be moved by it for quite other reasons. Mr. Sargent has never stood as high or so legitimately compelled admiration as here. For the artistic losses which we have suffered during the last two years he affords us in this unique group of portraits some compensation.

[Four of the Sargent Wertheimers are now in the vestibule to the left leading to the English rooms of the National Gallery.]



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## THE WERTHEIMER PORTRAITS

By the Late SIR CLAUDE PHILLIPS.

[We reprint the following article on the Wertheimer Sargents written by the late Sir Claude Phillips, which appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* of Jan. 8, 1923. It is interesting to note that the Wertheimer portraits, owing to the generosity of Sir Joseph Duveen, are to be hung in the new wing of the Tate Gallery, which will be opened this summer.]

The nine splendid portraits by Mr. J. S. Sargent, which together make up the Wertheimer Bequest, have been hung at the National Gallery, where they occupy nearly the whole of Room XXVI. A more remarkable display of modern portraiture of the higher order no European gallery can show.

It might have been imagined, even by those who unreservedly championed the cause of Mr. Sargent, and appreciated at their true worth these same paintings as successively they appeared before the public on the walls of the Royal Academy, that the bequeathed collection now brought forward as a whole would appear too extravagant in vivacity. The contrary is, however, the case. We have before us a series of canvases which for decorative beauty and elegance, for momentariness, for sheer vitality, it would be hard to match elsewhere.

We have not looked to Mr. Sargent for the most profound, the most permanent interpretation of his sitters, or that power which some great masters of the Renaissance had of drawing to the surface heart and soul. But here, in one or two instances, he has muted his brilliance, and exchanged it for a truer spirituality. In other portraits of the series there is the splendid bravura that has fascinated us for so many years, but even here we find moderation where our memory bade us look for excess. This should be a great lesson to those who are prepared to come to irrevocable conclusions as to the qualities and the artistic rank of a painter.

It has been the fashion of late years among the small fry of ultra-modernity to pooh-pooh the life-work of Mr. Sargent, and speak even of his greater achievements with condescension. Let them spend some time in the gallery here devoted to his works, and then think in sadness of the disrespectful nonsense in which they have allowed themselves to indulge. Not indeed, that even now we would place the consummate portraitist on the topmost pinnacle of art. Take him all in all, he stands alone now among the men of his day; but there are summits (and none knows this better than he) which he can never hope to reach. Having such a master among us, at the height still of his powers, let us nevertheless ungrudgingly acknowledge his value and do him honour.

### A LIVING, THINKING PICTURE.

The greatest painting in the set, the one at the root of the whole scheme of family portraiture, is surely the famous portrait of the donor himself—the "Asher Wertheimer," which on its first appearance was the source of so much discussion. This picture is somewhat darkened by time, and redder, too, in the flesh tones; with no appreciable loss, however, of expressiveness. Indeed, that element of the grotesque, of the caricatural, which some (including, indeed, ourselves) imagined they detected in it, is no longer noticeable. The "Asher Wertheimer" confronts the beholder on equal terms, not only living, but thinking.

A splendid piece of bravura as regards colour-scheme and arrangement, a striking conception altogether, is the double portrait, "Ena and Betty, daughters of Asher Wertheimer." Most brilliantly does it illuminate the gallery of which it is the central ornament. There are two elaborate portrait groups: "Essie, Ruby, and Ferdinand" (1902); and "Hylde, Almina, and Conway" (1903), the