

Date

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 1,150g. 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, Augustus John, G. F. Kelly, P. Laszlo, H. Mann, Sir John Lavery, Sir W. Orpen, G. Philpot, A. McEvoy, H. G. Riviere, Sir J. J. Shannon, and Fiddes Watt.