



Conversation Piece. Here given to Vermeer of Delft. 63 by 51 cm. (Private Collection, Holland)

AN UNPUBLISHED VERMEER BY A. BREDIUS

NO more intense detective work has been carried on in the field of art during these latter days of research work than that directed towards the discovery of an addition to the little list of authentic pictures by Vermeer of Delft. As all the world knows, only some forty genuine paintings by this great little master are known to us to-day.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the "fakers" have found in the brief and broken catalogue of his works a happy hunting-ground for their activities. No end of forgeries by these gentry have lately been submitted to me for what is now called "expertising."

Some are quite genuine old pictures, touched up with infinite nimbleness with tiny streaks and spots of the famous Vermeer blue, and the still more popular Vermeer yellow. Many, of course, are shockingly unlike anything Vermeer could have painted, but a few are so cunningly contrived by masters, if not of the art of painting, then of sleight of hand, as to deceive even very good judges. The late Dr. Bode himself in the "Repertorium" reproduced three such "Vermeers"—a biblical subject, a portrait, and a very intriguing Vermeerish laughing girl, the last inspired by the famous girl in the Hague Gallery.

A similar *Head of a Young Woman*, also a modern version of the Hague picture, this time with the mouth closed but with the same pearl imitated touch by touch, with the identical cracks on the surface of the original, and with the impressive "certificate" of a well-known adept, was brought to me at my retreat in Monaco.

An obviously French portrait of an obviously French boy with a marvellous wealth of hair, "discovered" by the late Dr. Hofstede de Groot, enjoyed the advantages of wide and elaborate publicity, but it now seems to have mysteriously disappeared! Then there was a landscape of the eighteenth century into which had been imported scraps of the *View of Delft*. Exhibited at Munich, this picture had been "passed" by Hofstede de Groot, with whom I had a sharp passage of arms on the subject in the Dutch papers. It was included in the Thyssen Collection. That even the most spirited controversies may do good was proved in this case by the fact that in the end everybody agreed that the picture was spurious, and Mr. Thyssen returned it "with thanks" to the people from whom he got it.

I could name dozens of fakes of this kind, but I prefer to rejoice the hearts of my readers by the production of a very beautiful authentic Vermeer which has recently been discovered.¹ Where this discovery was made, I do not know. At the moment of writing it is in the Hague in charge of Mr. Tersteeg, the son of the well-known former director of Goupil's Gallery in that town. I was struck with amazement when I first saw the beautiful thing. The splendid harmonious colouring, the true Vermeer light and shade, and the gentle, sympathetic theme proves it to be one of the finest gems of the master's oeuvre. The landscape on the wall is interesting. The form of the trees would suggest that this may be a lost picture by the painter himself.

The curtain on the left is the same as that which appears in his large picture, now in America, *The New Testament*. For years it was exhibited in the Hague and in Rotterdam. The same curtain also figures in the famous Czernin picture. The bodice of the young musician is blue, and blue also is the drapery on which the large lute to the left is placed. The colouring of the figure of the woman includes the true Vermeer lemon colour painted with unusually strong impasto. The young man, who is looking down on her with a serious expression, wears a grey mantle. He is leaning on the same musical instrument as may be seen in one of the National Gallery Vermeers painted in imitation of light-brown marble. The young woman wears a scarlet bow above her ear, which gives the "highest note" to the picture. It is marvellous in its effect. She also wears the large pear-drop pearl earrings which Vermeer loved to paint.

The fragment of Persian carpet on the table to the right is also worthy of note. Seen by the full light entering by the invisible window, it is a most elegant piece of work with its rich brilliancy of colouring in which red predominates.

But the greatest attraction of this picture lies in the subtle expression of the young girl, timid and yet inwardly well-pleased with herself. It is not often that we find such a delicacy of sentiment in a Vermeer face.

A picture, in short, which may indeed be called a masterpiece of the Great Man of Delft.

¹ We learn from Dr. W. Martin that it is probable that the picture will be exhibited at the Mauritshuis, but as we go to press no definite arrangement as to date has been made.—EDITOR.