

KAULBACH'S FRESCOES.

A GERMAN ARTIST'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

BY THE EDITOR.

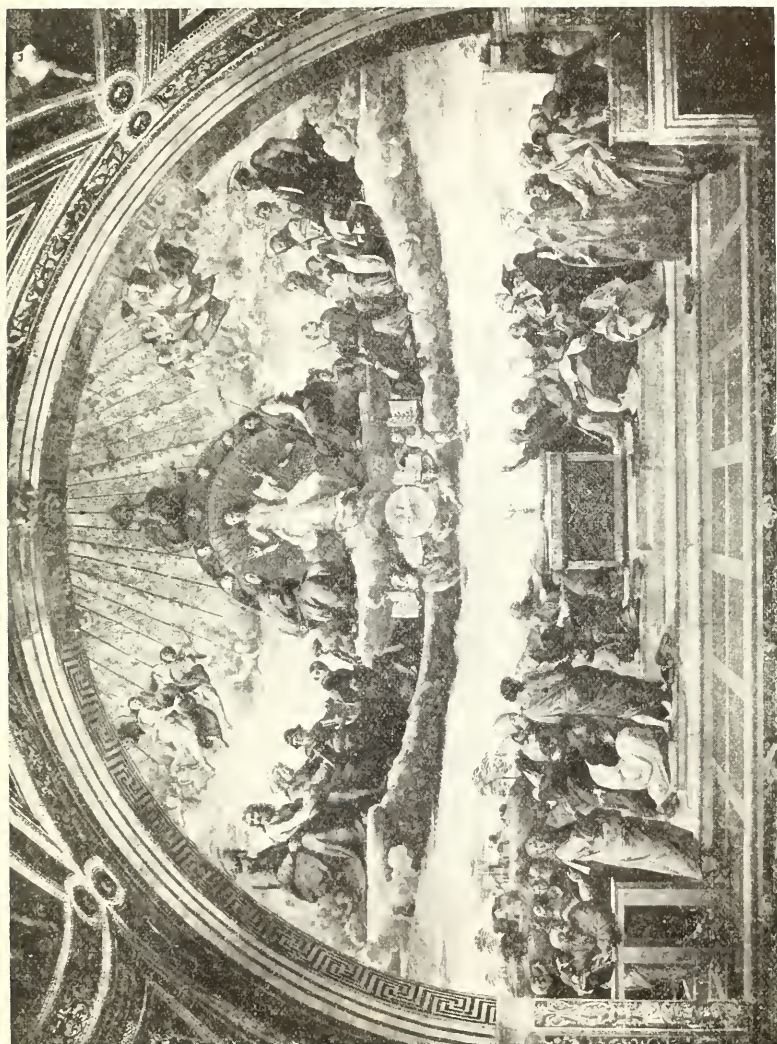
RAPHAEL had begun to present on the canvas the world-conception of the church. Its classical expression is found in his famous picture sometimes called "Disputa," and sometimes with



THE KAULBACH FAMILY.

more propriety "Theologia." Another picture of the same significance is Michelangelo's Last Judgment which sums up the end of all things in a grand display of the forces which move this world.

Christ descends from the heavens and the dead rise from their graves. They are separated into two groups; the pious are wafted to heaven under the protection of the angels while the wicked are left to the cruel treatment of devils.



RAPHAEL'S DISPUTA (THEOLOGIA).

In a similar way one of the most prominent Protestant painters deals with the same problem from the point of view of the nineteenth century. Wilhelm Kaulbach was born October 15, 1805, in Arolsen, and studied in Düsseldorf under Cornelius whom he followed to Munich. In 1847 he was called to Berlin to decorate the large

walls of the staircase hall in the New Museum with characteristic scenes from history which were to be so selected as to represent the religious world-conception of his patron the king of Prussia and Protestant Germany in general.



THE TOWER OF BABEL.

Kaulbach finished these frescoes in 1863. They remained the chief work of his life. He died of cholera in Munich in 1874.

The first picture of the series shows the Tower of Babel, a monument of daring mankind destroyed by God who descends upon it and curses the nations by the confusion of tongues. God, as Jehovah flanked by angels with fiery swords, stands in a glaring

halo of light. The laborers are frightened away from their work. In the center below Jehovah sits a despot surrounded by flatterers and other adherents who tolerate his rule. There are dead victims beneath his feet and a woman, who is probably the mother of the slain children, begs for mercy. On the left some laborers are still hauling up stones, but they are met by a woman who calls to them to stop. On the right hand we see a caravan of camels starting for distant lands. The lower groups divide themselves into the children of Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Semites of the type of the patriarch Abraham are on the left. The Hamite leader is departing with an idol in his arms; he is surrounded by a group of credulous and superstitious people. The Aryan descendants of Japheth, typified by Greco-Roman civilization, turn towards the right. Their rapid motion indicates the spirit of progress as well as delight in heroic deeds and the joy of living. In the right corner a scene is inserted which the artist deemed typical of the rudeness of the age, but it may as well serve as an illustration of all times representing the temporary triumph of Caliban. There is the hod-carrier knocking down the thinker who conceived the work the laborer was called upon to carry out.

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The second picture represents the glorious age of classical antiquity.¹ In the heavens we see the gods in triumphal procession on a rainbow. Apollo preceded by the three Graces and leading the nine Muses is followed by Jupiter and Juno. Above them hovers the eagle with thunderbolts in his claws. The king and queen of Olympus are followed by Minerva with shield and lance, Diana with her quiver, Mercury with his winged staff entwined by serpents, and other deities.

On earth the center of the picture is occupied by Homer whose advent in a boat is greeted on the shore by the Greek nation represented in front by statesmen, poets, sages, and in the background by a shepherd, a mountaineer, a hunter, a faun, and others. A priestess with a tripod before her sits at the stern and holds the rudder. From the waves, Venus is rising into the air to join the Olympian gods in heaven. On the right above this scene Homeric Greeks perform a funeral dance. On the left we see a temple like the Parthenon, and Phidias² at work upon an Athene statue. He lifts his hands towards Jupiter in an attitude of inspiration. Underneath we see a lawgiver inscribing laws upon a tablet of stone.

¹ See our frontispiece.

² Kaulbach here utilizes a well-known portrait of Phidias. (See page 312.)

In representing the destruction of Jerusalem the artist shows the avenging angels proceeding to earth from the clouds where are seated the four great prophets who have foretold the new covenant and warned Israel that she had not kept the old covenant with Jehovah. Below we look upon the temple area with the altar of



THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

burnt offering in the middle. Titus and the conquering Romans are entering the holy place in the background on the right. In front of them and upon the very altar are blown the trumpets of victory. Beyond the columns on the left we see the burning fortifications. The remnant of Jews around the columns are despairing of further

defence; old men raise their clenched fists to heaven in their helplessness.

In the center of the foreground the high priest is stabbing himself in front of the altar of burnt offerings. Several groups of terrified people surround the tragic scene, and in the left corner



THE BATTLE OF CHÂLONS.

Ahasverus the Wandering Jew is driven out into the world by the three furies. A ray of brighter prospects comes into the horror of this scene through the group of escaping Christians whom we see in the lower right-hand corner. A boy chanting psalms precedes them, and angels carrying the chalice with the eucharist attend them

as a guard. Three little orphans beg to join them and are welcomed by a little boy who is seated behind his mother on an ass.

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Several centuries elapse. Christianity having been established in the Roman empire is now threatened by the pagan Huns, and the fate of Europe is decided on the Catalaunian plains (the present Chalons-sur-Marne).

The legend goes that the dead warriors arise on stormy nights and fight the battle over again. Here stood Attila supported by his Teutonic allies, the Ostrogoths, Gepides and others, while the Roman governor, Aetius with the Visigoths, Burgundians and Franks withstood the Scourge of God. The artist shows the dead on the battle field, among them the women of the butchered inhabitants. They are being awakened to join the spirits in the air in order to help gain the victory of the cross over the savage hordes of Asia. (See the illustration on the preceding page.)

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We now come to the age of the Crusades. Christ has conquered and his hosts now invade the lands of Islam. He stands with outstretched hands in the sky, worshiped by his mother, the Virgin Mary, and surrounded by saints, among whom we notice John the Baptist on the extreme right and Stephen, the first Christian martyr, on the extreme left. Underneath the figure of Christ we see the Crusaders of the first Crusade at the moment when they reach their goal, Jerusalem, an event described in history as highly dramatic. Having reached the top of the surrounding mountains these pilgrim warriors saw the Holy City before them. They shouted aloud, wept tears of joy, and prayed to God and gloried in their faith. Six youths carrying the ciborium are preceded by the vanguard and three prelates on asses. Geoffrey of Bouillon, the first king of Jerusalem, who however called himself in Christian modesty the protector of the holy sepulcher, follows behind on a white charger. He is holding a golden crown in his left hand, thus indicating his intention not to wear a royal crown where his saviour had worn a crown of thorns. He is followed by his army of which we see only the front consisting of standard-bearers accompanied by men who hold up the conquered ensigns of the Saracens. The several groups in the foreground characterize the different types of the age. On the right we see representatives of knighthood, three of them arm in arm.

Passing towards the left we see two minstrels, a flagellant,

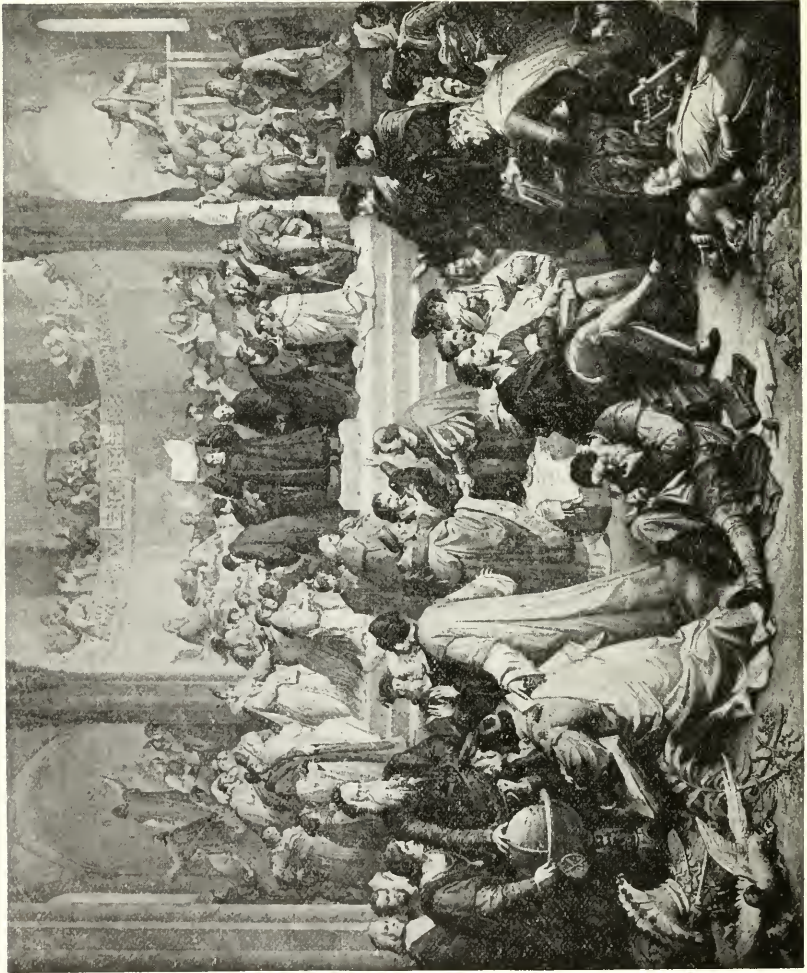
Peter the Hermit, and other pilgrims. On the left the romantic and adventurous aspect of the age is portrayed by a knight accompanied by his lady who is carried on the shoulders of serfs; another similar couple behind them show their love of sport by their hounds and falcon.



THE CRUSADES.

The last picture of the cycle represents the Reformation. It deviates a little from the former frescoes by bringing us down to mankind. Here there is no division into heaven and earth. Luther stands in the center holding up the Bible made accessible to the common people by his translation. He is surrounded by other re-

formers. We would identify the one on the right with Calvin. The sacrament of both bread and wine is administered to the congregation. In one of the communicants on the right we recognize the Prince Elector of Saxony. Behind him stands Gustavus Adolphus with drawn sword. The same place on the left is held by Queen



THE REFORMATION.

Elizabeth. The niche on the left hand shows us the progress of astronomy; on the right, art. In the foreground we see at the right Dante before an audience among whom Shakespeare is conspicuous. In the center sits a scholar, probably one of the humanists. Above him the Lutherans and Calvinists join hands under the kindly advice

of Zwingli who points up to Luther. The group on the left shows us Galileo Galilei, his hand resting on the globe, together with his disciples and opponents. One of the latter declares Galileo's unbelief is not in conformity with the scriptures which he holds in his left hand. Another clergyman behind this doctor of theology shows his disapproval by a characteristic attitude of his hands. Medieval sport is discarded as we see in the left lower corner. On the right an archeologist is studying the sculptures of ancient Greece. Above Luther we see an organ loft symbolizing the development of church music. In the composition of the picture this occupies the place which corresponds to the super-terrestrial portion in the rest of the series.