THE TRIUMPH OF HENRI IV
BY RUBENS

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More and more during recent decades connoisseurs have come to cherish the oil sketches by Rubens, finding in them an intimacy and vivacity which make a special appeal, quite different from that of the grander pictures toward which they point the way. In the presence of these small paintings on oak panels we feel ourselves close to the source of Rubens's genius as it poured forth its abundant pulsating torrent of pictorial compositions. Here we catch the creator's ideas per se in their activated, nascent state before the intrusion of technical problems concerned with covering large areas and devising grandiose harmonies of color, undertakings which at best imposed burdens upon the creative spirit and at worst called for the facile aid of studio assistants.

Rubens's sketch of the Triumphal Entry of Henri IV into Paris, recently acquired by the Museum from the collection of Mrs. John W. Simpson (and formerly in the collection of the Earl of Darnley), is 19 1/2 inches high and 32 5/8 inches wide. At some time in the past century it was transferred from the original oak panel to canvas but has now been moved again to a wood support. It is a study for the large painting (about 12 ft. 6 in. by 22 ft. 8 in.) now in the Uffizi in Florence. The work on the Uffizi painting was never entirely completed, for reasons which will be reviewed later in this article, but the multifarious elements of the composition are presented with clarity and vitality, and these are found also, with certain minor differences, in our preparatory sketch.

As the triumphant procession in our picture surges onward we see Henri high above the struggle, riding alone in a golden quadriga with white horses. His proud head is bare, and he wears a suit of shining armor. One hand grasps the rim of the chariot while the other carries a branch of olive. Victory, flying through the air, places a wreath of laurel on his head, while the helmeted goddess Bellona holds the reins, and Apollo, crowned with laurel, follows with his harp. A woman, perhaps Minerva, leads the near horse by the bridle. Thick around the chariot are struggling mortals bearing torches, trophies, and standards, while musicians rive the air with sounds of trumpet and shawm. Out ahead are mounted soldiers turning the procession toward the opening of a triumphal arch. Behind the king's chariot trudge bound captives contrasting sharply with the populace typified by contented family groups to right and left.

The painting as a whole is very sparing in the use of color. The family groups are executed in rapid strokes of brownish gray lightly touched with flesh color, which give much the same impression as Rubens's superlative wash drawings on paper. Most of the color in the painting is concentrated in the section near the chariot, but even here the hues are played up delicately against the pervading undertone of old ivory. The king himself is pale, his hair and beard gray and his mantle light blue; the musicians are dressed in butter yellow and steel blue; a warrior in half-armor, looking backward over his shoulder, carries a rose-colored flag, while a lavender banner bellies in the breeze above Bellona's head.

Special students of Rubens's sketches, notably Leo van Puyvelde, have attempted to divide the sketches into two classes: first, the ébauches, or rough drafts, which are of small size and rendered with little or no color, blueprints, in effect, for the guidance of shop assistants; and, second, the somewhat larger modèles or samples, which are more strongly colored and were intended as specifications to show prospective clients what the proposed pictures would look like. Our Triumphal En-

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try has been placed in the second class. It is somewhat larger than most Rubens sketches, but the color, as we have observed, is unequally distributed and very far from being full-bodied Rubens color. Apparently it was only in a few early sketches, such as the Museum’s Adoration of the Magi, painted in 1617, that the color to any degree approximated that in the finished production.

A small rough draft of the Triumphal Entry (only 8 in. by 14 in.) belongs to the Wallace Collection in London. It differs in many respects from our sketch and from the Uffizi painting. The cavaliers and the flanking groups of townspeople have not yet been thought of. The woman holding the horse’s bridle wears the classical helmet of a goddess, and the musicians and trophy bearers precede the quadriga. The trophies themselves are arranged in a more insistent pattern against the sky, thus revealing more clearly Rubens’s dependence upon Mantegna’s Triumph of Caesar. Rubens saw this set of pictures by Mantegna in London at about the same time that the Triumph sketches were painted. He combined many of Mantegna’s pictorial elements into a single painting (National Gallery, London, no. 278) in which the sedate quattrocento elephants are brought up to date with passionate eyes and wildly gesticulating baroque trunks.

It is interesting to note that our Triumphal Entry was part of the same grand allegorical cycle as the Story of Marie de’ Medici, which now fills the great gallery of that name in the Louvre. It was in the spring of 1622, twelve years after the death of Henri IV, that Rubens undertook for the Queen Mother the task of adorning two large salons in her newly built Palais du Luxembourg. The gallery at the right was to be attended to first, and it was to tell in twenty-one allegorical scenes the story of Marie de’ Medici herself. In May 1625, the formal opening took place, only a little more than three years after the date of Rubens’s agreement with the Queen Mother. Less prompt were the arrangements for the decoration of the left gallery, in which Rubens had agreed to paint the Story of Henri IV. Almost a year after the opening of the first gallery, Marie sent her excuses to Rubens for not having found time to consider what subjects should be represented in the second. On the twenty-seventh of January 1628 Rubens at last wrote that he had begun the sketches for the Galerie Henri IV, which, because of the splendid subject matter, promised to be more successful than the Galerie Marie de’ Medici. But by midsummer he was away on a diplomatic mission to Spain and thence to England, and it was March 1630 before he returned to Antwerp. Meanwhile Marie, having suddenly lost patience, was flirting with the idea of engaging another artist to do the work. Richelieu, who had never liked Rubens, and whom the artist had suspected of making trouble for him as early as 1625, now urged her to send to Italy for Giuseppe Cesari, the Cavaliere d’Arpino. Someone else suggested Guido Reni for the task, and Marie made inquiry through Cardinal Spada about both of them, but nothing came of it all. By October 1630 Rubens had knuckled down to work in good earnest and some of the largest and most important pictures, such as the Triomphe du Roi, which was to be placed at the far end of the gallery, were already far advanced. But now he received word from the Abbé de St. Ambroise, treasurer for Marie de’ Medici, that the architecture of the salon had been changed and that it would be necessary to reduce the height of the pictures almost two feet. In despair Rubens stopped work on the Story of Henri IV and he was destined never to take it up again. The Queen Mother, having quarreled long and bitterly with her son Louis XIII and with Richelieu, the power behind the throne, was placed under restraint at Blois and later at Compiègne. Rubens, referring to these shocking events in a letter of March 27, 1631, counted himself lucky at any rate because the difficulty over the dimensions of the paintings had caused him to suspend work at least four months earlier on the second gallery of the Palais du Luxembourg. The next time Rubens saw the Queen Mother was after her escape to Flanders, and by that time she was in such a predicament that he felt constrained to lend her money out of his own pocket.
A sketch by Rubens for the Triumphal Entry of Henri IV into Paris. A detail photographed in color by Charles Sheeler is shown on the cover and other details on pages 216 and 217.
What paintings then had been completed for this great Salon Henri IV? No contemporary account tells just how far Rubens had gone with them. Presumably there were to have been twenty-one paintings as in the Marie de' Medici cycle. A catalogue of the pictures found in Rubens's studio after his death describes, in the English version, “Six great clothes (i.e. canvases), ye beseiging of Townes, Battailies, and Triumphs of Henry the 4th, ye French Kinge; not full made; which he had begun some yeares past for the pallace of the Queene Mother of France.” Two of the “great clothes” mentioned were presumably the paintings now in the Uffizi, the Triumphal Entry of Henri IV into Paris, and its pendant—the impetuous Battle of Ivry—which Rubens had abandoned in a less advanced state. A sketch for the Battle of Ivry was at last report preserved in the Musée Bonnat at Bayonne. For the Triumphal Entry there exists, in addition to our sketch and its forerunner in the Wallace Collection, a small study for the flying figure of Victory said to have belonged to Sir Charles Robinson in London. The Wallace Collection contains two further small ébauches, one representing the Birth of Henri IV, the other the marriage of Henri and Marie de' Medici. Still another composition is preserved for us in the sketch of the Taking of Paris by Henri IV, belonging to the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum. It shows the king touching with his scepter a kneeling figure, supposedly Lutetia (Paris), who gives him the key to the city, while defeated lansquenets are being thrown from a bridge into the Seine. A small panel (9 by 7½ in.) was in the Burtin sale, held in Brussels in 1819, and later in the Cardon sale, held in Brussels in 1921, at which time it was illustrated in the catalogue. It shows Henri IV in a hall of state receiving his scepter from the people. The Genius of Peace and Union protects him from Hypocrisy and Discord. In the Liechtenstein Gallery, Vienna, are two curious moderate-sized panels of the series which have allegorical figures in their lower sections and historical scenes above, representing respectively Henri IV Seizing the Opportunity to Conclude Peace, and Henri at the Battle of Coutras.

Thus we know with some degree of certainty how eight of the scenes in the Henri IV cycle would have looked. Of the six “great clothes not full made,” which were among Rubens's effects after his death, four have dis-
appeared, but Max Rooses, the great cataloguer of Rubens's work, thinks two of them may be identified with the large upright canvases, 14 Brussels feet in height and 10 feet 10 pouces in width, described as being by Van Dyck and Snayers in the catalogue of the Fraula sale, Brussels, July 18, 1770 (nos. 106 and 107). One painting represented Henri Laying Siege to Paris, in which spies bring news of Spanish reinforcements for defense of the city. The other showed Henri at the Battle at Coutras and is described as containing more than a thousand figures, so that one can hardly credit it with being an enlargement of the Liechtenstein sketch, where action is circumscribed within a cartouche in the upper story of the panel.

The celebration by Rubens of these several high moments in the life of Henri IV and our necessarily less colorful listing of them here raise questions concerning the actual events and aspects on which the paintings were based. Henri de Navarre, later Henri IV, King of France (born 1553, died 1610), lived much of his life in the field with his armies, and there is little doubt that he looked more than his age. In our painting of the Triumphal Entry Rubens is correct in showing him with gray hair despite the fact that he was only forty years old at the time of his taking Paris. Even earlier his inamorata, Gabrielle d’Estrées, had referred to him as “his Majesty with the gray beard.”

As a high-spirited young man Henri de Navarre had found himself a Protestant aligned with the Condé and Huguenot faction and likely to become king at some future time—king of a France as sadly torn by inner conflicts as France can be. Opposed to him was the Catholic League, with its own candidate for the throne, led by Catherine de' Medici and the powerful house of Guise, a league willing to support its position by the dangerous expedient of importing the foreign soldiery of the King of Spain. Henri's first important military victory was at Coutras on the twentieth of October 1587, where the élán of his men and the skillful use of his three cannon had
defeated the superior armies of the Catholic League.

The effeminate Henri III, before his murder at Saint-Cloud in 1589, had selected Henri de Navarre as his successor to the throne, and the decisive two-hour battle at Ivry in March 1590 made him king in fact. He soon laid siege to Paris, but with only half his chivalrous heart, for he feared that if he gained the city his Huguenot troops would avenge too bloodily the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

Four years more of fighting followed Ivry, but Henri knew also how to win peace and union by means of cheerful and bountiful bribes and finally by abjuring Protestantism. On the twenty-seventh of February 1594, in the Cathedral at Chartres, he had himself anointed king with the cruse of Saint Martin of Tours. And now it was time for him to enter Paris. Especially since his conversion Henri could count upon powerful adherents within the city. On the night of March twenty-first he set out secretly from the hamlet of la Chapelle between Saint-Denis and Paris. In Paris itself everything went according to plan. Grossier and his men took charge of the Quartier de Célestins and the neighborhood of the Bastille, Langlois dislodged the Spaniards from the ramparts extending from the windmill near the house known as l’Ardoise and the Temple to the Porte Saint-Denis and drove a wedge between the Spaniards and Walloons. At the Université the Neapolitans were easily worsted. The Comte de Brissac, who had previously removed the gates of the Porte Saint-Denis on a pretext of making some repairs, now also forced open the Porte Saint-Honoré and the Porte Neuve near the Tuileries. Greffier, a member of the League’s inner council, who was lodged in the Université near the Neapolitan troops, tried to incite the foreigners to resist, “mais ses efforts tournerent en fumée,” and he found himself quickly surrounded on all sides by the bourgeoisie. Later that same tumultuous night the king’s troops marched into the city. One detachment advanced along the Seine from the Porte Neuve meeting no opposition until it reached the Quai de l’École. There a squad of lansquenets was encountered, defeated, and thrown from the bridge into the river. Another body of troops advanced easily from the Porte Saint-Denis to the Châtelet. By the light of early dawn came the king himself, entering through the Porte Neuve and proceeding down the Rue St. Honoré to the royal residence in the Louvre. And, in the words of Jean Baptiste Legrain, “Ce qui est admirable, est que sur le Midy après que le Roy eût rendu graces à Dieu en l’Eglise de Paris on veit toutes les boutique ouvertes, & les marchan-
dises précieuses, qui avoient esté resserées durant le gouvernement des Espagnols, ex-
posées en vente. . . . Les Chefs à sçavoir les Prevost des Marchans & Eschevins . . . faisans marcher devant eux le Heraux qui publiaient au son des Trompettes, l’heureuse entrée de sa Majesté en sa ville, avec l’abolition & Par-
don general de tout le passé, ausquelles Trom-
pettes, se joignirent ces cris de, Vive le Roy, qui fendoiert l’air par toute la ville” (from Decade contenant . . . Henri le Grand, 1614, p. 280).

Thus, much as related pictorially by Rubens, did Henri IV win back his kingdom. Naturally he was not in a Roman chariot when he entered Paris, and we know, of course, that Lutetia was not kneeling before him in person nor could Hypocrisy and Discord be seen in the flesh while the lansquenets were hurtling from the bridge. A similar mingling of his-
torical events with grandiose allegory is pres-
ent in most of the other compositions in the series, but that is just the sort of glorious mélange that we eagerly anticipate from Ru-ens—and if we have taken time to recapituate the actual story of Henri IV it is only in order more easily to identify the leading themes on which Rubens based his symphonic suite.