



San Francisco Call, Volume 96, Number 26, 26 June 1904 — Sire and Son Will Share Honors. [CHAPTER]

Sire and Son
Will Share
Honors.

Fine Works of
Masters to
Be Seen.

PARIS, June 25.—There soon will arrive in New York, en route for St. Louis and the exposition, a painter of the age of 13 with an established European reputation already at the back of him. A strange boy, as may be imagined; an anomaly in every sense of the word, with nothing of the characteristics of his years, gifted with a talent marvelously mature. His name is Tada (Thaddeus) Styka.

The little prodigy's father is Jan Styka, a painter, known the world over as the illustrator of Sienkiewicz's "Quo Vadis." He is an Austrian subject, born at Lemberg (Poland), and, left an orphan at an early age, was soon studying art and earning his living at it meanwhile in Vienna and Rome. He returned home in 1890 and there painted his magnificent composition of "Polonia"—his motherland per-

sonified by a tortured woman, around her the great ones among her children protesting in the face of heaven. This excited such admiration that a public subscription was set on foot to purchase it and it now hangs in the place of honor in the Town Hall of Styka's native city of Lemberg. Any reproduction of the painting is forbidden in Russia. A friend of the artist at Warsaw was discovered with a print of it in his possession and is still in prison, perhaps in Siberia, for this dire offense.

Jan Styka next accepted a commission from Paderewski to paint the Crucifixion and spent the entire year of 1894 in the Holy Land. The result was his "Golgotha, the Place of Skulls," which was first shown in Paderewski's palace at Warsaw, but is now on its way to St. Louis. He was also the painter of that huge panorama of "Nero's Circus," which was one of the features of the Paris Exposition of 1900.

The work, however, which has established his international reputation must be held to be the pictures to "Quo Vadis." In a series of fifteen gigantic canvases he has portrayed the principal scenes of that famous book with an accuracy, a detail and an emotional effect that none but a genius could attain to.

SON'S GENIUS BORN.

It was during the progress of these "Quo Vadis" pictures that his son, little Tada, manifested his talent and finished by convincing his father of it, sternest and most exacting critic of them all. M. Styka has five sons. The other four played with their toys or indulged in rough and tumble, but Tada, the eldest, remained in his father's studio, looking with wondering, reflective eyes at the work going on around him. Then he would pick up a pencil lying near and without a word begin to sketch the objects that

caught his notice. Still life, or parts of his father's paintings, but principally, first of all, animals, commencing with the domestic cat lying sleeping upon a cushion.

The father at first paid no heed, busy in his own work, and thinking nothing of these boyish fancies; but his friends and visitors began to question and to prophesy. For the boy was trying now with palette and with clay—dogs, horses and other animals still holding his preference as models. Then he and his father came to Paris, the rest of the family remaining in Poland. Jan Styka had grown used to his son's companionship, grown used to his presence in his studio, and so brought him with him.

In Paris the reproach was made to Styka that the boy's education was being neglected, so the father, as he thought in duty bound, as much against his own will as his son's, sent him to the Jesuit Fathers in the Rue de Vaugirard. It is to be feared that in science and mathematics Tada was considered inattentive, but he brought back the gold medal for drawing.

Another development followed. One day the boy brought to his father a life-size canvas depicting his conception of Silenus, the rubicund Bacchanalian, with the vine leaves in his hair. It was impossible to dispute further. The boy at 11 years of age had declared himself a born painter.

Yet even then the father was not quite sure. They were living in that great block of studios on the Place Pigalle, which Puvis de Chavannes and so many others have rendered illustrious. Heller and Gerome were living next door, and Styka went to see them, and ask them to judge the work. The reply was decisive. The Jesuit fathers saw Tada Styka no more. He came to live with his father—two comrades (it is his father's own expression) working together in their art.

Thenceforward they abided together.

fellow artists sharing one studio, but certainly equals. It was with the "Quo Vadis" pictures that they inaugurated their partnership, for the boy is responsible for no inconsiderable part of them. All the animals are his—the lions and tigers in the arena, the swans at Agrippa's feast, Lygia's greyhound

and the galloping horse of Vinicius. And his is not only the execution, but even the conception and design, sketched from nature or created from imagination.

PAINTS TOLSTOI'S PORTRAIT.

The boy next did his portrait of Tolstoi, which was hung in the Paris salon of last year and created no little sensation. But he still worked on, never taking lessons, never having taken lessons, offering, on the contrary, advice to his father which might easily have emanated from a veteran in the art. Heller, their next-door neighbor, came in occasionally and gave him valuable hints, but there were never any lessons or semblance of them, for the reason (it is Jan Styka again who speaks) that this boy of 13 had already acquired his art by natural gift.

He has just sent in two canvases to the salon, which were instantly accepted—a portrait of his father and, strange and difficult introspection, a portrait of himself. In the studio, among other works, there hang two studies of "Ecce Homo" and a study of the "Flight of Icarus," not yet finished. There are, too, innumerable drawings, as well as several works of sculpture, including one of a long-haired greyhound, which is wonderfully clever. This last manifestation of his genius is perhaps the most striking of all. The father is not a sculptor, and so could not have taught Tada had he wished. The boy somehow got hold of a handful of clay, and when the dog, a stray pet of the studio, strolled in, modeled him then and there.

He is also copying Holbein at the Louvre. A special authorization had to be obtained for him from the Minister of Fine Arts, it not being the custom, protested the administration, to admit children of such tender years.

Another canvas that well illustrates the trend of his talent is a Hungarian battle scene. His father is working upon a composition, "Bem and Patofi," the heroesh of the Hungarian war of independence. Tada saw it and depicted it, too—not in servile imitation, but as his own, independent vision saw it, the grouping, coloring and general plan entirely distinct. "For," he said naively, "I also would like to be a Meissonier."

It can easily be imagined that Tada Styka does not present many points of resemblance with other boys of his age. Small, even for his years (especially in comparison with his father, a broad-shouldered giant), thin and pallid, with the eyes that grasp the vision of truth and beauty and the mobile mouth that speaks of limitless potential emotion, he is bright and cheery when roused, but loves rather to rest in repose, and is timid because sensitive, silent because absorbed.

He has had his romping, of course, and recalls with pleasure his bicycling escapades with Jean de Reszke's son last summer at St. Jean de Luz. He rides a horse and enjoys it, and in the studio can be seen an elastic home exerciser, to make him strong, says his father, since health and strength are the handmaidens of successful art. But the truth is, he exists only for his work. "Taciturn and solitary," they termed him at the Jesuits'; but it was no such thing. No morbid limitation, only an absolute self-devotion.

IS FATHER'S COMPANION.

Father and son live alone together in their studio of the Place Pigalle, Bohemian both. There is no show of au-

thority on the father's side. Tada is "serious," and needs no guiding hand. So they work together, and for recreation roam out to see the galleries, the Luxembourg or Louvre.

It is wonderfully interesting to see them paint simultaneously from the same model. She sits before their two

easels and is posed, the son making suggestions to the father, and the father generally carrying them out. Jan Styka works very rapidly with powerful brush in long, unwavering strokes. Tada is more timid, seeking his medium, choosing between the many possibilities his vision sees. The father has gained his effect, broad, experienced, florid; the boy refines, idealizing, dreaming with nervous touch. And the model sees her dual personality emerging from the two canvases; and the father's picture flatters her so that she smiles, but the son's leaves her pensive.

At the St. Louis Exposition, in a special building, Jan Styka will exhibit his "Quo Vadis" series, together with his "Golgotha." Tada Styka will be represented by five pictures there, his "Tolstoi" portrait and four others.

Of his future plans nothing certain is known. He would like to win the Prix de Rome; but for that he must become a naturalized Frenchman, and then the dreadful military service (doubly dreadful to an artistic nature such as his) would have to follow. Perhaps when they have once known America the Stykas will learn to love it and make it their future home.

This article has been automatically clipped from the San Francisco Call, organised into a single column, then optimised for display on your computer screen. As a result, it may not look exactly as it did on the original page. The article can be seen in its original form in the [page view](#).