

## **M0007198: Text on the portraits of Thomas Sydenham**

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Moreover, I have examined many of Lely's paintings and I confess this does not seem to be in his mood. However,

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Thomas Sydenham  
1624-1699

LONDON,  
July 17th to 22nd, 1922.

FIG. 3. REPRODUCTION OF THE PORTRAIT OF SYDENHAM AT OXFORD.

we must not quarrel too much with well rooted beliefs.

#### THE ARTISTS

Sir Peter Lely (born Peter van der Fals) was a very highly esteemed portrait painter of his period. Owing to his long sojourn in England, where he attained great fame, he is counted among the English painters. He was born in 1618 at Soest in Westphalia, where his father, whose nickname "Lely" was later given to his son, was a captain. By his contemporaries Lely's name was spelled Lely, Lylley, Lylly, and Lilly, as fancy dictated. His artistic abilities showed in his early childhood, and his father sent him to the Netherlands for study. At

first Lely painted mostly small landscapes and historical works, but after visiting England in 1641 with William, Prince of Orange, where he saw the master works of Van Dyck, he gave up his former occupation of landscape painting and devoted himself entirely to portraits. His special talent for depicting feminine loveliness soon made him famous. His success in executing the likeness of the royal family earned him the title of Royal Painter, and his fortune was thereby assured. After the death of Charles I, whose portrait he made in the last stormy days at Hampton Court, he entered the service of Cromwell, who also sat for a portrait by the painter. Following the Restoration, and about two years before the painter's death in 1680, Charles II made Lely a Knight Chamberlain. He knew Samuel Pepys and several times is mentioned in the "Diary," following visits made by Pepys to the studio of the artist. Pepys speaks of him as "the mighty proud man" and tells us that he once saw an unfinished portrait of Lady Castlemaine, the King's mistress.

In his later career there were many artists working in his studio. This studio has been referred to as the "Lely Studio," and a number of paintings are attributed to it by the various art galleries. Hugh May, Sonnius, Wissing, Hawker, among others, were assistants of Lely, especially in painting the draperies and backgrounds. Most authorities agree that the flesh painting is the ultimate test of the authenticity of Lely's work, rather than the background.

His works have been copied repeatedly by various artists, especially by Mrs. Beale, who sometimes painted several copies of Lely's originals. The number of portraits listed under Lely's name is 196, of which the last three were

painted in 1680, just before his death. No portrait of Sydenham is mentioned by C. H. H. Baker in his listing of Lely's paintings, a fact of some significance perhaps.

Mary Beale was the daughter of the Reverend J. Craddock, and was born in Suffolk in 1632. She is mentioned nearly always as a pupil or "favorite pupil" of Sir Peter Lely's, but it seems probable that she studied under Robert Walker and only copied the works of Lely. However, there seems to be little doubt that Lely was extremely fond of her. She married Charles Beale of Walton-on-Thames, as a young woman of twenty-two, and her husband kept a diary of his wife's activities for nearly ten years up to 1681. The diary gives a full account of Mrs. Beale's life and her work and has much of interest concerning Lely. Beale himself was a chemist and made many of the colors used by Lely.

Mary Beale's oldest son, Bartholomew, studied medicine under Sydenham and became a practitioner, which is further evidence of the close acquaintance of the two families. The second son Charles became a portrait painter and assisted his mother. He died the same year as Sydenham.

Mary Beale, who probably painted the last portrait for which Sydenham sat, has been variously appraised, considering the worth of her productions. She did subjects in oil, in water color and in crayon. Her heads are often surrounded by an oval border painted in imitation of carved stone. Some of her biographers have gone so far as to consider her as among the best portrait painters of the seventeenth century. Her works are rather numerous and there is, therefore, excellent opportunity to judge.

On the whole, while she was in great vogue during her lifetime, Mrs. Beale

was largely a copyist. Her paintings are in general regarded as lacking in feeling and color, and they are not held in



FIG. 4. PHOTOGRAPH OF MARY BEALE'S PORTRAIT OF SYDENHAM, IN ARMY MEDICAL LIBRARY.

great repute today. Baker says of her that, "She was a painter of industry, scant training and slight feeling," and he holds her responsible for any Lelyesque piece which is obviously too poor to be by the master himself.

Mary Beale died in 1697. Her fame has remained even if she was not one of the masters. Her portrait of Sydenham in his last years has an honored place in the Army Medical Library, no less than Sydenham's works which adorn our rare book shelves.

#### Author's Note:

Since this paper was submitted for publication the author has received a response to an inquiry from Sir Humphry Rolleston,