

THE PAINTER FRANTZ CLEIN IN DENMARK

BY

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WITH 17 FIGURES IN THE TEXT

D. KGL. DANSKE VIDENSK. SELSK. SKRIFTER, HIST. OG FILOS. AFD., 7. RÆKKE, V. 2.



KØBENHAVN
LEVIN & MUNKSGAARD
EJNAR MUNKSGAARD

1936

Printed in Denmark.
Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri A/S.



Fig. 1. Print-room. Copenhagen.

No other Danish king employed so many painters as Christian IV. Born in 1577, he was only 11 years old when his father, Frederik II, died. In 1596 he was crowned. Even as a child he had painters in his service. We know altogether the names of 14 painters employed by Christian IV in his youth and early manhood. But only one, *Johan Enum*, from the town of Flensborg in Sleswick, was a Dane. The others were German or Flemish.

About 1619 the king had finished, just outside the town of Copenhagen, a country seat which in 1624 was named "Rosenborg" (castle of roses¹).

The ceiling in the banqueting hall was decorated with framed oil-paintings. Altogether there were 30 pictures on the ceiling which, as is the case nowadays, was probably barrel-vaulted. Besides, there was a painting on either side of one of the fireplaces at the end of the hall, making the total number of the pictures 32, which, to judge from those still preserved, had life-sized figures in the foreground.

Two foreigners, who visited the castle at the time of Christian IV, relate that the pictures represented scenes of human life or the occupations and amusements of man at different ages of life.² Four of the five painters employed by the king were either Danes or in other ways connected with Denmark; but they had all studied

¹ V. WANSCHER, Rosenborg. Copenhagen 1930. With an English summary.

² Tagebuch Christian des Jüngerer, Fürst zu Anhalt, herausgegeben von G. KRAUSE 1858. — Caroli Ogerii Ephemerides sive iter Danicum etc. Paris 1656.

in Italy, where, judging from the pictures still preserved, they had learned — from the late Renaissance and early Baroque — to master the representation of space and the free movements of the figures in space.

The only foreigner among the painters of “the long hall” at Rosenborg was *Frantz Clein*. He is said to have been born in Rostock, but the year of his birth is unknown; his father is reported to have been a goldsmith. We are told that Frantz Clein stayed four years in Rome. Undoubtedly he must have studied in Italy and been to Rome, his art showing that plainly, but it also shows that he must have



Fig. 2. Frederiksborg Castle.

visited Venice. A pen-and-ink drawing in the print-room in the Danish Museum of Art, a Satyr who with a lantern in his hand is watching a sleeping woman, bears the signature: *francesco Clein 1615*. But because the artist has italianized his name it does not follow that he was staying in Italy when he made this drawing.

Two years later (1617), he is expressly mentioned as an “inhabitant of Copenhagen” in connection with some work of mainly mechanical nature. And from the same year dates a pen-and-ink drawing, fig. 1 (also in the print-room at Copenhagen). Besides the date the artist has written under the drawing: *Zur freundlichen Gedächtniss gemacht in Copenhagen Frantz Clein*. The drawing represents Apollo flaying Marsyas. Two years later, on May 15th 1619, the artist receives 452 Daler as payment for two large paintings styled: “The Story of a Fireworks” and “Children’s Play” which he painted for the King in “the large new house” (the present Rosenborg) in the King’s Pleasure Garden, together with portraits of the king himself and of his

eldest son, and for 14 figures drawn on grey paper. All these works were delivered partly at Rosenborg, partly at the royal castle of Copenhagen¹.

The picture representing the fireworks (fig. 2) is now at Frederiksborg. As often in the art of Tintoretto, the foreground figures are seen from the position of the



Fig. 3. Christiansborg Castle.

onlooker, i. e. represented as being seen obliquely from below, while the perspective of the background is executed in relation to the foreground figures. Besides the influence of Tintoretto, some of the female figures to the left and to the right in the foreground show that the artist was familiar with the female figures of Paolo Veronese. The designation "The Story of a Fireworks" is very appropriate. For not only in a picturesque sense is the painting dominated by the fireworks from the castle of Saint Angelo in the middle of the background, but — with the exception of a few — the figures are absorbed in regarding the fireworks.

¹ Our knowledge in this case and all the following ones is derived, when no other source is mentioned, from the treasurer's accounts in the Danish State Archives.



Fig. 4. Kronborg Castle.

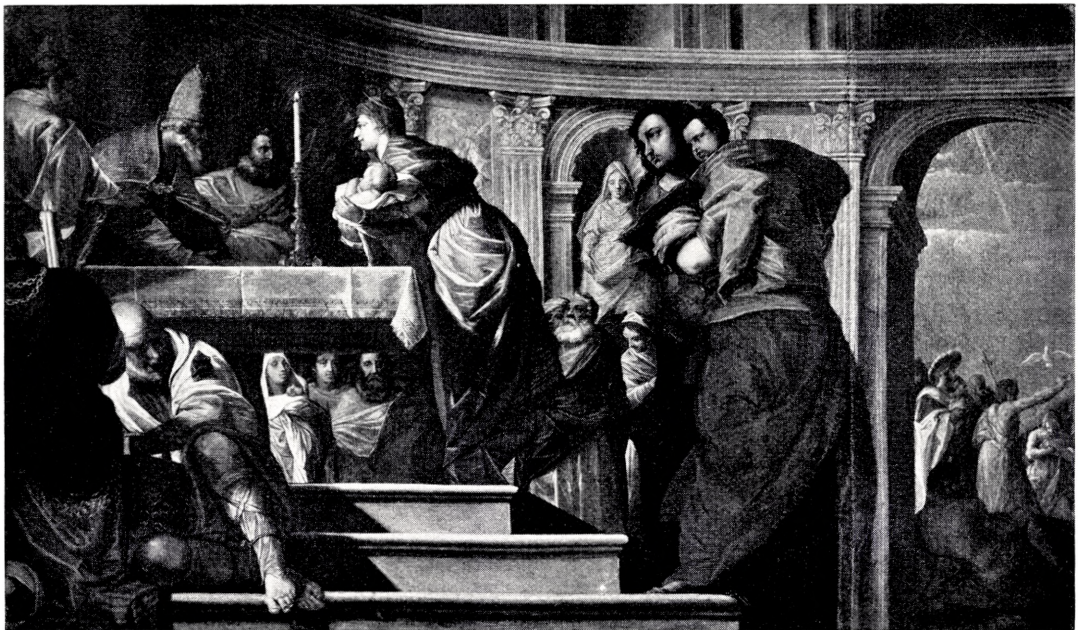


Fig. 5. Danish Legation. Berlin.



Fig. 6. Frederiksborg Castle.

The other painting for which the artist received payment in 1619 is, as already mentioned, put down in the accounts of the paymaster as "Children's Play". This picture has not been preserved, unless the title is due to a misunderstanding in the treasury office, a misidentification with a picture representing "children on their way to school", now at Christiansborg (fig. 3). The signature of the painter, *F. Klein* is found below the staircase to the left. Here too the foreground figures, to a certain degree, are seen obliquely from below. But bright day-light is falling in from the left. The group to the left, placed in front of the dark background, is dominated by the tall, fair female figure clad in a yellowish-red coat and a whitish under-cloak. Altogether the group is worked out in six planes. The bent female head to the left is evidently influenced by Paolo Veronese. But, strange to say, the boy in the first plane has his head out of joint.

The figures to the right, grouped around the beautifully posed female figure, are more loosely composed; and farther in the background there are other groups which enhance the impression of depth in the picture.

The painter's failing sense of the exterior architecture is striking. The house

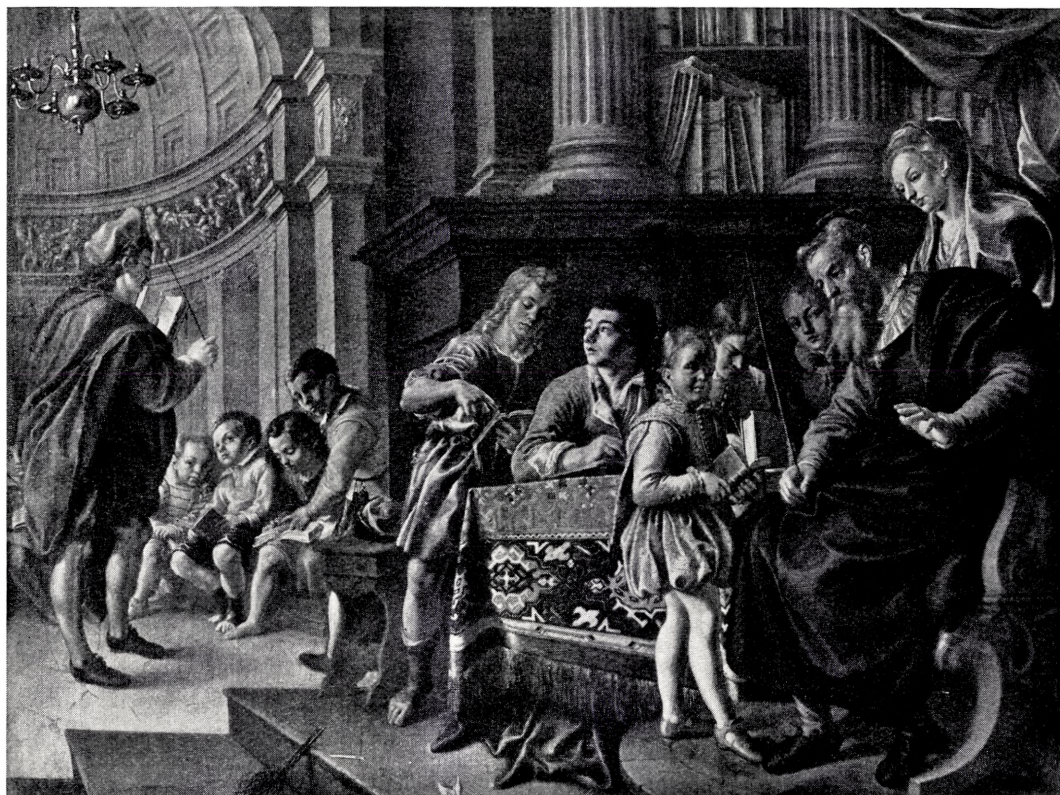


Fig. 7. Kronborg Castle.

to the right looks like a wooden scene; the school-house, a Roman temple, has red-painted column shafts, while the gable roof, the attic-gables and the windows in the half-story are northern Baroque, as is the case with the spire of the tower to the right.

Perhaps we may in these groups see traces of the art of Paris Bordone and Bonifazio Veronese. But the painting of Frantz Klein is sadly lacking in the delicate, warm colourings of the two North Italian painters. The effect of the colours is here cold and motley.

In the same year as Frantz Klein had delivered the two paintings "The Story of a Fireworks" and "Children's Play", he further received on Dec. 23rd 200 Daler for "a large painted piece" and 3 Daler for six figures on grey paper¹, all of them meant for the King's Pleasure-Garden (i. e. at Rosenborg).

And in the following year November 17th 1620 he once more received 200 Daler for a large "oil painted piece", delivered for the king's Pleasure-Garden outside the city and — it is expressly added here — "it is meant to be set up in a frame under the ceiling in the new long hall".

¹ Possibly they were models for the "figuren von Gyps gegossen" in the long hall at Rosenborg, mentioned by Prince Christian of Anhalt in his "Tagebuch".



Fig. 8. Rosenborg Castle.

At this time he derived, for about a year, a small extra income from teaching one of the king's illegitimate sons to copy paintings. His salary for a year's teaching was paid on March 31st 1621. But in the same year he is painting a large "piece of art" for Rosenborg. He received one half of the pay in advance on July 12th 1621, the other half on delivery on September 28th of the same year. It is expressly mentioned that "the large painted piece is meant to be set up under the vault in the long hall of the new house in the Pleasure-Garden". Next year, on the 15th of April 1622 the artist was again paid one half in advance for "a large painted piece for the long hall in the castle". The size is here mentioned as being "5 (Danish) ells long, 4 ells high". But not until the 9th of April next year did he receive the remainder of the salary on delivery of the picture. This is the sixth and last of the artist's paintings for "the long hall".

So we see that the painter's execution of this picture was a rather long drawn-out affair, lasting almost twelve months. But in the meantime he had executed for the king a "Patron", i. e. a pattern, for "a table-cloth". To judge from the payment — 100 Daler — it must have been a fairly good-sized one.

On the fourth of September 1624 he is paid 150

D. K. D. Vidensk. Selsk. Skr., Hist.-filos. Afd., 7. Række, V, 2.

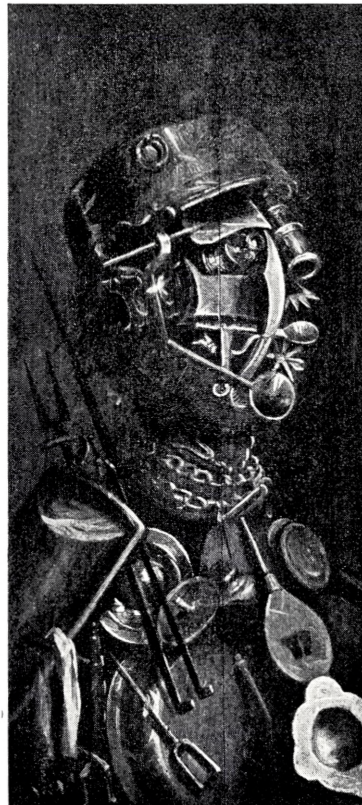


Fig. 9. Rosenborg Castle.



Fig. 10. Rosenborg Castle.

Daler for works of quite another kind: Two paintings representing Copenhagen seen from two different sides. And once more, for the last time, he is mentioned in Denmark on November 5th 1625, when he receives 100 Daler as payment for another table cloth pattern.

Besides the fireworks picture, verified in the accounts of the paymaster, and the painting with the school-children, bearing his signature, there is still extant a picture for the long hall at Rosenborg, signed by the painter. It represents a wedding ceremony in a southern Baroque-church (fig. 4).

As a work of art this piece suffers sadly from the extraordinarily bad execution of the main figures with the poorly modelled hands; but the interior of the church is well done, the two little boys to the right are very well character-

ized and the composition, five figure-planes deep, is rather remarkable. In the front plane farthest to the left, as if separating itself from the principal group, is the group of the mother with her child; it obviously testifies to his acquaintance with the art of Parmegianino. And the (differently posed) figures behind the bridal couple are seen in different lights.

From whom Frantz Clein acquired the skill of adapting dramatically the distribution of light and shade in his painting is clearly seen from one of his pictures

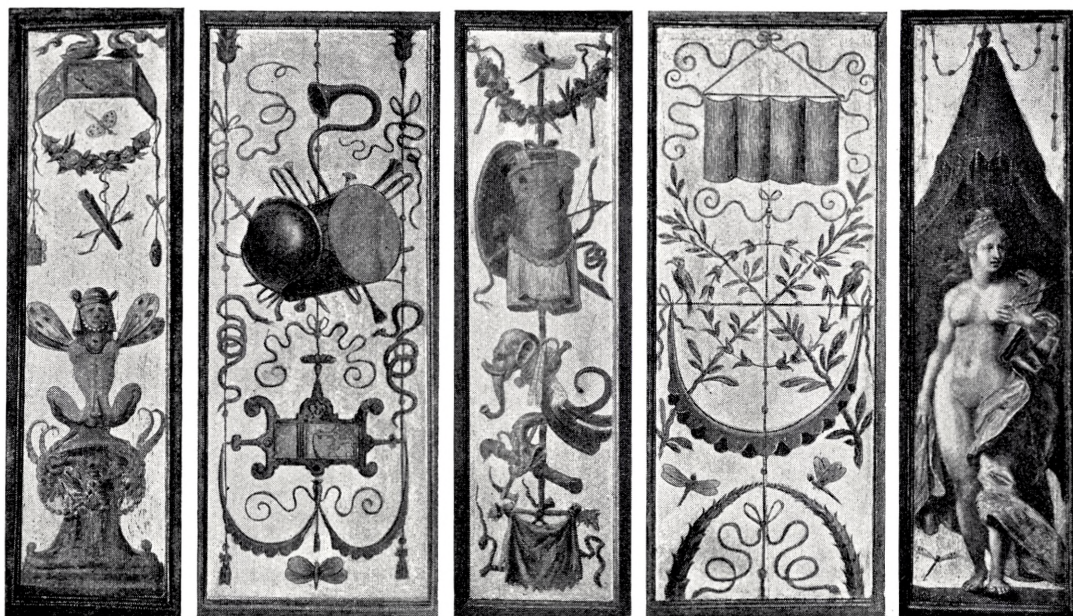


Fig. 11—15. Rosenborg Castle.

(fig. 5), a copy of one of Tintoretto's paintings (now in the Academy of Venice); the greater part of the canvas is taken up by the presentation of Christ in the temple. It differs in some details from the original¹, so that one is inclined to believe that it was made after a sketch Frantz Clein himself had executed from the original. The group farthest to the right is probably inserted to add to the breadth of the picture and so to adapt it for the place where it was meant to hang. Through a portal one sees a representation of the Baptism of Christ. The front figure to the left is a copy of the statue of Michelangelo, "The Day", from the sepulchral monument for Giuliano de Medici in Sagrestia Nuova at San Lorenzo in Florence. We must suppose that Frantz Clein had been studying this statue. And as the figure is no doubt meant to represent the river Jordan, one is led to believe that Frantz Clein had seen in Rome the antique marble river-gods which have influenced Michelangelo's statue. The motifs of the picture certainly do not agree with the brief description in the subject-index of the ceiling pictures given by the two foreign visitors to Rosenborg at the time of Christian IV; but this discrepancy may be explained away by the fact that the Virgin is only recognisable by a thin golden halo, so that the picture might readily be interpreted as infants being brought into a church. The picture to the right with the Baptism of Christ might easily escape notice. But in any case we are justified in doubting that the picture was painted for the long hall at Rosenborg.

¹ Mr. ZAHLE, Denmark's ambassador in Berlin, has called my attention to the original.

Frantz Clein's fourth Rosenborg-painting, a nursery, is quite differently composed. One notes that the five female figures are seen from different sides (fig. 6). But the composition is certainly more artificial than natural. The figures are painted in glaring side-light while the grey architecture in the background to the right is kept in a light *clair-obscur*. One of the two men sitting at the table is wearing a tall reding felt-hat as we know them from North-Italian pictures, for instance in Jacopo Bassano's painting in the Museum of Art in Copenhagen representing the execution of St. John the Baptist.

Frantz Clein's best painting in Denmark, both as regards the handling of space and the composition of figures, is "A Boys' School" (fig. 7).

The lessons are given in a grey baroque church; and in front of the coffered semicircle of the apsis we notice the excellently executed brass-chandelier. The frieze in the apsis shows playing children. One recognizes the two little boys in the apsis from Frantz Clein's picture of the wedding ceremony, bearing his signature, and the characteristic feature of the artist, the knock-kneed steps of the figures, comes out strongly in this picture, as we see it in the boy standing in front of the old head-master and also in the principal figure in the background, the young teacher. Most beautiful from a picturesque point of view is the school-library at the top to the right. The books are placed with their different coloured edges turned outward. The woman to the right is very much like the other female figures of Frantz Clein especially those in "The Fireworks" picture. The excellently done table-cloth from Asia Minor in the foreground asserts itself strongly.

In the same year, 1617, when Frantz Clein is expressly mentioned as an inhabitant of Copenhagen and authentically known to be working for Chr. IV, he is payed, on the 11th of November, 350 Daler for "some stories and various works which he has painted for the large new house in the King's Pleasure-Garden (i. e. the present Rosenborg) as well as in a chamber over the gateway of that building". "The chamber over the gateway" — that is opposite the gateway-building — must be the little tower-room on the ground-floor, Christian IV's writing-room. Here a craftsman, Samuel Clausen, had done the painting. He received his pay, 80 Daler, on March 7th 1617.

Clein's framed paintings are inserted in the ceiling, in the wainscots and in the window-frames.

In the centre of the ceiling one sees a pastoral scene (fig. 8). In the middle of the picture the view opens to an alpine landscape with lakes, a boat, and a village with a church with a northern spire.

In the squares surrounding the picture are painted: Saturn with his scythe and weeping children, Athena, Venus und Cupid, Juno with a peacock and two *grisailles*, elopement scenes; one of these probably representing the elopement of Helena. All these small pictures are vividly and powerfully drawn, especially the *grisailles*. But none of the figures are seen from below upwards "di sotto in su"; as is the custom with this artist, it suffices for him to paint the details seen obliquely from below.

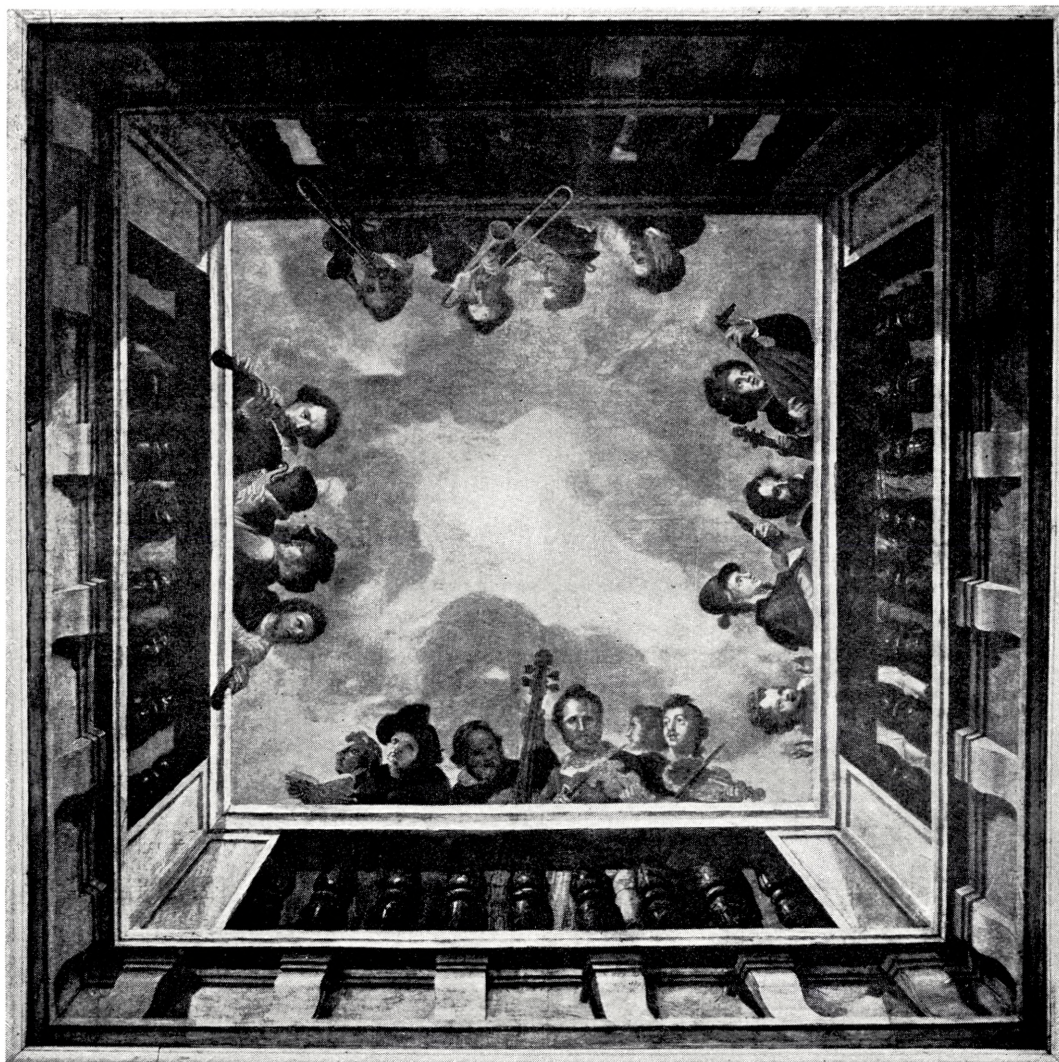


Fig. 16. Rosenborg Castle.

The wainscot-paintings — which are not so well preserved — are very diversified. There are seven female bust figures in the costume of that age; three of them are characterized by their attributes as Faith, Hope and Love. "Faith" shows that the artist is well acquainted with Palma vecchio, but he has not been able to acquire Palma's colouring. Further, there is a male bust picture, also in the costume of the age, and some landscape views, two dog-pictures and a carousing couple which suggests that the painter was familiar with the naturalistic Italian school. Best of all the paintings — a splendid piece of art — is the fantastic half-length picture made up of kitchen utensils and styled: *cucina*, the Italian word for kitchen (fig. 9).

Further, there are two paintings in the panels of the door, one of which represents a southern harbour, the other one the Rialto-Bridge in Venice (fig. 10) — further evidence that Frantz Clein had been staying in that town.

Lastly we find in the window-frames some very fine and fanciful, but somewhat faded "Grotesques" (fig. 11—14). It is the only place in Denmark where there is an opportunity to see this kind of ornamentation for which the artist later on gained great credit in England. In one of the window-frame pictures Venus steps out of her tent (fig. 15) — a delicately drawn and beautifully posed female figure — which once more shows the painter's intimacy with Italian art. In the opposite frame is a picture of Mars.

But yet another picture of Franz Clein's "various works" at Rosenborg may be mentioned here. It is now to be found in the centre of the ceiling in the south hall on the ground-floor, at that time called "The Queen's Apartment" according to Wanscher's standard work on Rosenborg. Here the painter has demonstrated his power of creating an illusory effect. For, above the beholder he has painted the clouded sky. Underneath the sky is a square balustrade above a cornice. And in the gallery behind the balustrade are seen playing musicians, six stringed-instrument players and six wind-players and some people moving in the gallery. That Frantz Clein has executed the ceiling-painting is apparent from the fiddler farthest to the right (fig. 16). His head is identical with the head of the shepherd in the "writing-room"¹.

On the 15th of May 1619 Frantz Clein received pay for various works amongst which are the portraits of Christian IV and his eldest son, Christian. The latter (fig. 17), a life-sized picture, is now as far as can be ascertained at the castle of Fredensborg in North-Seeland. The powerful contrast between light and shade, the delicate "clair obscure" from which the prince stands out in full light against the folded red hangings, and the somewhat stiff legs with bent knees suggest the painter's identity.

In "Anecdotes of Painting in England" HORACE WALPOLE relates that Frantz Clein in Rome had become acquainted with two Englishmen Sir Henry Wotton and

¹ Wanscher supposes, no doubt rightly, that the picture was originally a ceiling-painting in the north room on the ground-floor, the kings' "winter-apartment".



Fig. 17. Fredensborg Castle.

Sir Robert Anstruther. They recommended the artist to Prince Charles, a nephew of Christian IV. Frantz Clein came over to England while Prince Charles was away in Spain, but the artist was graciously received by the father of the prince, King James I, married to Princess Anna, a sister of the Danish king. Walpole's statement may be correct as far as we know. Sir Robert Anstruther is well known from Danish history¹. He was Christian IV's agent in England from 1606 with a fixed annual salary, and he was employed by the English government on diplomatic missions, especially to the Danish king. His credentials were dated Febr. 3rd 1615, his instructions Jan. 3rd of the same year. So he may have been the agent between the two royal brothers-in-law concerning the Frantz Clein business.

Prince Charles stayed in Spain in 1622 from March till October. And as Frantz Clein on April 15th of that year received in advance half of his payment, the other half on the 9th of April the next year, for a large painting for "the long hall" at Rosenborg, it is not excluded that he may have spent part of the year 1622 in England; but he must have been back in Denmark before Nov. 5th of that year; because on that date he received his payment for the pattern of the aforesaid table-cloth, executed for the king. But he did not return to England during King James' lifetime. For the last payment the artist ever received in Denmark was given him on the 25th Nov. 1625, and King James died already on the 27th of March of that year.

It is a well known fact that Frantz Clein won a reputation in England through his labours in different fields: at the tapestry factories in Mortlake, by ornamental wall- and -ceiling-painting in London mansions and as a graphic artist.

He died in London in 1658.

¹ BRICKA og FREDERICIA, Kong Christian den Fjerdes egenhændige Breve. I S. 87 Anm. 1; 133, Anm. 3.