

WHITLIER.

Jas. Abbott McNeil Whistler, was born in Lowell, Mass., in 1834. So he is now 61 years old. He was educated at West Point. After leaving school he studied for two years at the studio of Gleyre in Paris. In 1863 he went to London and within three years he has settled in Paris.

He has become cosmopolitan, not through love of cosmopolitanism, but because he is disgusted with America and England. He is conceited, eccentric, aggressive. He possesses a magnetism which pushes away from him friends and admirers. The history of his life is a record of desertions.

He wrote the "Gentle Art of Making Enemies" to show how to convert friendship into enmity, to cut himself loose from all who opposed him and to prove to everybody how little he cared for anybody. Truly the book shows how to make enemies. And the publicity has made reconciliation impossible; but his third object is not accomplished. He would not have published the book had he cared not at all for the loss of his friends. He cannot keep the bitterness of their loss from out of his pages.

Under these conditions it is difficult to consider him and his works with impartiality. His pugnacious attitude puts us either on the defensive or else behind him where we face his enemies with somewhat of his own spirit.

Hostile criticism has affected to some extent his work, though I think a fair critic will not call his painting, on the whole, eccentric. Some parts of some pictures are painted in a spirit of bravado and defiance, as for instance the foot of the little girl in the portrait exhibited at the World's Fair. The master pieces, by which he must be judged, are superb examples of drawing.

Whistler's influence on modern art is tremendous. Younger and less aggressive artists have yielded to his influence and picture buyers have testified to the soundness of his principles by their patronage. Not the founder of the impressionist school, he was an impressionist before the word was. Probably Edouard Manet, of France, born in 1833 had more to do with the founding of this school than Whistler. At any rate Whistler's early work shows Manet's influence. Poor Manet died in 1883 before the tide of appreciation, then turned his way, had reached him. Nor had he fully expressed himself. But the hints which his work gave of another starting point than the academic one were enough for a keenly modern mind like Whistler's.

A late French review of the work Whistler has in the Musee du Luxembourg shows the adoration the French feel for his work.

"The most illustrious among its members, M. Jas. McNeil Whistler, is today one of our citizens, and it is even among us here that he has studied in 1854 in the Atelier of the Gleyre, still he can not be attached to this school nor precisely to any other contemporary school. His art, profoundly original, is made up of sensations of dreams and of fantasy, of stratagems, of implications and of mystery; it seems to have come from the palette of Velasquez and of Goya; it is relieved by a point of irony and of British eccentricity, with something, you cannot tell what, captivating and unexpected, taken at caprice from the imagination of the Orient. Le Musee du Luxembourg justly prides itself on possessing his chef d'oeuvre most poetical and most moving, the reverend picture of his mother, seated and thoughtful in that arrangement in grey and black, gentle, sad and full of depth, which puts us in communication with the dreamy soul of the model. Mr. Whistler exhibited his first picture in the salon of rejected pictures in 1863. This picture was the Girl in White and made a great sensation. Then after

having exhibited in the salon of 1865 and 1867 he showed nothing more for fifteen years. In 1882 and thereafter he appeared regularly in the salon with a series of superb master-pieces. Mistress Harry Meux, the portrait of his mother, Carlyle, (now in the museum at Glasgow) Lady Archibald Campbell, M. Thomas Deuret, etc., together with a number of those harmonious combinations of tones; arrangements in black, in blue and silver, in grey and black, in green and grey, in purple and rose, in opal and silver, nocturnes and marines profoundly strange, affecting and fantastic, apparently seen in the spirit of Edgar Poe or of Baudelaire and as with the enlargement of a dream of the memory."

The translation is literally rendered. The French appreciate him, the English, in the person of Ruskin, their elected monarch of art, call him "an impudent coxcomb for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

All nations go to Paris to study art, all, I should say, except the English. They stay at home, mostly; or if they do go they never forget that the "sun never sets on the British empire." Their fingers are as stiff as their necks. They might as well stay at home. They took an outsider like Ruskin for their master, and art in England is lifeless.

At the World's Fair it was easy to compare the master pieces of Chase, Sargent, Zorn, Baldini, Aivazovsky, Breton and Millet with Sir Frederick Leighton, Alma Tadema and Millais. The work of the Englishmen is a terrible example of what happens to a nation tied to a tradition academic which refuses support to genius if the genius go about his appointed work in his own way.

Paris then, the art-school of the nations, recognizes a master in Whistler and welcomes him with unconcealed pride.

In the famous suit of Whistler vs. Ruskin in 1878, the plaintiff sued for £1,000 damages and received one farthing. The artist contends that the critic has no right to call him in the public prints a "coxcomb" and to refer to him as charging a hundred guineas for throwing a pot of paint in the public's face. Mr. Ruskin thought that he and men like him, who have studied art from the outside all their long, and in so far useless lives, should stand between the public and the painter for a double purpose. Firstly, for the good of the artist, to interpret nature to him, and to keep him from straying from the strictly defined path of historical development marked out by his predecessors; in the second place, their function is that of an interpreter to the public. If it were not for the critic artists might get an audience of their own and expound their own revelations; the public would look and not listen and in time might feel some of the wonderful mystery of color.

Until Mr. Whistler's protest the critics had succeeded in making people think their mediation necessary. Ruskin was especially idolized. He took for granted that no further progress was possible in painting, that the Italian masters had settled the limits and the technique of that art years ago, and that a modern who attempted to follow his own inspiration showed only brazen impudence and incapacity.

People in Nebraska, far from a creative center, whether of literature or art, knew better than that years ago. The sweep of the prairies, the limitless sky, have taught the irreverence of distrustful one's own inspiration. After having acquired knowledge and training from the schools each human being must be guided by that inner light which his creator has lighted and set in his soul. If he extinguish it whether by following some other light or in any other way creation is thereafter impos-



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sible, his body is a corpse. No intelligence, however small, is without this light, but the soul of a genius glows with it and all should reverence it as the gift of God through him to them.

The supremacy of Ruskin was baleful because he hindered progress. For a time truth could not get by him. He had his own great gift. What lovely English he wrote! His phrases are musical, poetical, orientally rich. He was a maker of books; he belongs to literature. Art never knew him. He should have kept his hands off that which was not revealed to him. He never knew that genius is as various as humanity and must always make its own choice of expression.

In 1892 forty of Mr. Whistler's works were exhibited at a picture dealer's in London. The shop was crowded most of the time and most all the pictures were sold at high prices. In fourteen years the people had learned to enjoy his pictures, tho' they are not yet through laughing at him. The London correspondent of *The Nation* in reviewing the pictures, says "Ruskin's teachings are already obsolete except in the provinces. Whistler's power has grown with the years."

His early pictures show him a master of line and color, his latest ones a master of tone. He can paint the wet grey of a Thames twilight, so that the next time we see the Thames in that light the greys reveal themselves to our own eyes and we feel their tenderness, depth and relation to each other.

Whistler, twenty years ago, was a quarter of a century ahead of his contemporaries. When a man gets far ahead of the procession, it, the procession, thinks him crazy; it scoffs and hisses, spits on him and sometimes will crucify him if he be weak enough to allow them to do it.

In Whistler's case persecution has made him the champion of three continents. He is abreast of the twentieth century which will enroll his name among the highest names of the nineteenth. It will forgive his conceit and his malice for the sake of the genius and his willingness to sacrifice everything else to it.

His method of painting is his own. He uses his table as a palette. He takes out from his tubes large lumps of color and uses very large brushes. After they are painted he places his pictures out in the sunlight to dry.

Whistler paints pictures. He is concerned about aspect, never about situation. Yet in all of his portraits the beauty of the spirit overpowers even the beauty of composition. Of the combination of colors mystically related he has made the study and experiment of his life. He leaves story telling to the makers of books, he will have nothing to do with dramatic situation or historic moments. His audience must not expect him to be literary. He is an

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artist. He has that to teach us we can not learn from books nor even from nature. For "nature contains the elements in color and form, of all picture, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music."

But the artist is fain to pick and chose, and group with science these elements that the result may be beautiful, as the musician gathers his notes and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos glorious harmony.

To say to the painter that nature is to be taken as she is is to say to the player that he may sit on the piano, (Ten O'clock).

I have spoken of his unmeasured influence on artists in the last twenty years. The modern school owes more to Whistler than any other influence. He trusted in God and did as he was commanded; he heeded not man nor his ways. Valesquez was his predecessor. He studied him reverently, constantly and never lost an opportunity to praise him. He was influenced as well by the simplicity and decorative scheme of the Japanese. But his original genius is so strong it has cut its own channel. "He was harder hit than most artists," Raphaelle or Tintoret or Titian could not paint like this? The ideas that make this style of painting possible were not yet in the world. They could not paint this way any more than they could use the telephone. Another century and Whistler may be called an old fogey, that is, technically artists may go further, but the poetry of his conception, its strength and sincerity will not be surpassed.

His pictures are characterized by an absence of vulgarity; and the saccharine quality which is so evident in Bouguereau, Meyer von Bremen and Millais

Think how maddening to have a picture like "Breaking Home Ties" forever on your walls. How the people at the fair gabbled "Oh's" and "Ah's" before this picture; how silent they were before "The Lady With the Yellow Buskin." Which picture would you rather live with? I think this a final test. Where the color scheme is the work of a master it will take me years and years to learn its secrets, perhaps I never shall. Never mind, all the while the concept of beauty is growing in my soul. It is less and less easy to satisfy with anything cheap or unhealthful.

SARAH B. HARRIS.