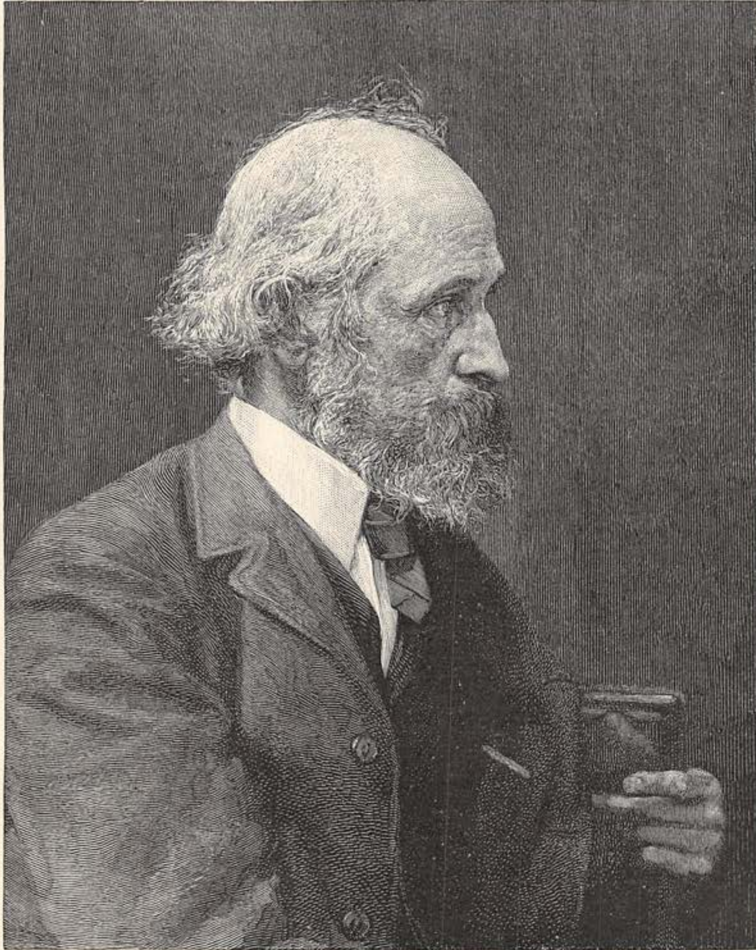

ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE. FROM PHOTOGRAPH BY G. C. COX.

WILLIAM JAMES STILLMAN.

RETRACING the career of the author of "On the Track of Ulysses" is like following the course of Ulysses himself. "Much-roving," "much-enduring"—these Homeric epithets fit also our American, whose wanderings, however, are not yet over; at least he is still separated from his Ithaca by the full breadth of the unharvested sea. His very birthplace was a dislocation. I could never reconcile myself to Asa Gray's being native to New York, and not to the New England soil of his parents; and still more markedly did Stillman, born in Schenectady, New York, betray a Yankee lineage. Between the birth of his more mechanical brother Thomas, in fact, and his own coming into the world, the family had migrated from their Rhode Island home.

As if to set a seal on his unrest, fate would have it that the youth of twenty should graduate from Union College in 1848. Though he took at once to landscape-painting under Church, his ardent temperament could not be insensible to the revolutionary glow of the period, and Kossuth's arrival in this country in December, 1851, fully enlisted Stillman in behalf of the Hungarian cause, and gave him his first introduction to the complex "Eastern Question," which was to absorb the best thoughts and the best energies of his life. In 1852 he accepted from Kossuth a perilous mission to Vienna, to bring away the crown

jewels secreted by the exiled chief. I have heard him tell how, when his task seemed hopeless and the chance of his arrest unpleasantly good, he chose a stormy night to commit to the Danube his compromising credentials. The boot that hid them in its heel had hardly splashed in the river before he was challenged by a guard, who good-naturedly smiled at his bad German, and let "a foreigner" pass. The amateur revolutionist quickly made his way to Paris, and, taking up his brush again, entered an atelier.

This was Stillman's second visit to Europe. His first was in 1849, when Ruskin was midway in the publication of his "Modern Painters," and was hanging out his "Seven Lamps"; when, coincidently, the Preraphaelite Brotherhood was in the first twelvemonth of its existence. Acquaintance with Rossetti and the other leading spirits of this movement made of Stillman a true believer. With Ruskin, whose conversion came later, in 1851, he struck up the warmest friendship, and subsequently named for him his ill-starred first-born. The personal affection outlasted his detachment from the doctrine of that eloquent but incoherent moralist. After twenty years he could proclaim publicly that "Ruskin's *art*-teachings are utterly wrong." Meanwhile, in 1855, under the double influence of the prophet and the Brotherhood, he founded, with John Durand, the short-lived "Crayon" in New York, and though he still continued to exhibit at the Academy of Design, of which he had become an associate member, the litterateur began to get the better of the artist. The "Crayon," as conceived, had a literary as well as an artistic side, and this brought Stillman into familiar and delightful intercourse with Lowell and the Cambridge circle of wits, scholars, and savants. He joined a choice band of them in the Adirondacks in the summers of 1858 and 1859, and there was painted — I believe in the former year — his best-known and most poetic piece, "The Procession of the Pines." Another, and for its associations even more precious, canvas, now owned by Judge Hoar of Concord, Massachusetts, shows the distinguished group that included, besides the painter himself, Emerson in a white slouch-hat and blue hunting-shirt, Agassiz, Jeffries Wyman, Lowell, John Holmes (brother of the Autocrat), E. R. Hoar, Estes Howe, Amos Binney, and Horatio Woodman. "Wise and Polite," wrote Emerson of them in his poem "The Adirondacs" (and Judge Hoar has affixed the lines to the frame):

> Wise and Polite, — and if I drew
> Their several portraits, you would own
> Chaucer had no such worthy crew,
> Nor Boccace in Decameron.

Of this company Stillman was the guide, philosopher, and friend, and it was he who, after constructing a temporary camp on Tupper's Lake, called upon Lowell for an inscription, whereupon the bard reeled off, without pause or hesitation, an impromptu beginning,

> Whom rain doth welter
> Or heat swelter,
> Respect this shelter,

and weaving in a history of the shanty, the share taken by each in the work, and the names of the entire party.

The portrait which accompanies the present sketch of Stillman will give no idea of his appearance in those wild-wood days. Tall he was then, of course, and slender, and of a build which seemed to warrant the prediction of an early death by consumption, while in truth he possessed a wiry constitution and a remarkable vitality. A wealth of long, brown hair framed a handsome, smooth-shaven face, with broad, intellectual forehead, large eyes, and well-shaped mouth, of which the smile was something to be remembered. His sight was as keen for a mark as it was sensitive to the beauties of nature, and the supple fingers that bespoke the artist and the artisan pulled a trigger with good effect. Firearms have always been a passion with Stillman, and they typify his spiritual combativeness, his readiness to engage in controversy, which, after all, is perhaps only one manifestation of the Yankee impulse to propose an "improvement" on everything under the sun. His innate mechanical inventiveness has chiefly been expended upon cameras, for he has practised, experimented in, and written authoritatively about photography for more than a quarter of a century, and twenty years ago he published a manual of the art. When making the noble series of plates, partly architectural, partly picturesque, of the Acropolis of Athens which he published in 1870, the astonished Greeks saw him clamber to a windy perch on the top of the Parthenon, for the sake of that plunging view which shows the only portion of the sculptured frieze *in situ*, together with that convexity of the horizontal lines of their temples in which Stillman sees a subtle intention of the Greek architects to exaggerate the perspective.

The camera has but confirmed the practical divorce from the palette effected by his acceptance of office in 1861 under the administration of Lincoln.. To use his own words:

> It was my misfortune to spend eight years of my life in the consular service of the United States. From the first post, that at Rome, I was removed to silence my remonstrances against the disgraceful state of our legation there; and, after

our usual shopkeeping system, I was sent to a distant station at my own expense, after having been financially ruined by my official countrymen at Rome.

The new station was Crete, where, in the spring of 1865, Stillman was brought face to face with "the unspeakable Turk," at a time when the island was on the eve of a fresh revolt. The history of this episode must be read in his "Cretan Insurrection," with its admirable descriptive chapters, and its graphic tale of the horrors of a conflict which he did nothing to incite, while sympathizing with the insurgents and risking his life for them. His complicity with them consisted in nothing more than being a sort of postman between them and Europe; and as his own consular colleagues were largely dependent on him for information to transmit to their respective governments, and were skilfully worked upon to that end and to procure intervention for the helpless objects of Turkish vengeance, Stillman naturally came to be regarded, both at Athens and at Constantinople, as the head and front of the rebellion. His activity in these two directions resulted in a great mitigation of suffering on the part of the non-combatant Christian population, who were taken off on foreign war-ships, and it more than once encouraged the combatants to fresh efforts which only Russian policy, perhaps, rendered futile. The persecution he had to endure in consequence from the local authorities and Mussulman population in Canéa made him almost a prisoner in his house, and finally drove him to transfer the consulate to a yacht. As the rebellion languished to its end, the Turkish government obtained from Secretary Fish his removal. Nevertheless, he was permitted and even encouraged to visit Constantinople on a peaceful mission which bore no fruit.

The Porte's nervousness in the presence of Stillman recalled that of the lion-tamer in the "Wandering Jew" on being followed about at all his performances by an Englishman who was bound to be in at the inevitable catastrophe. Nothing is more curious than Stillman's account, in his "Herzegovina and the Late Uprising" (1877), of his visits now to the half-implicated Montenegrins, now to the rebels in camp and on the battle-field, and now to the Turkish headquarters — all in the space of a few weeks. His immunity lay in his having become a correspondent of the London "Times," which he has remained to this day. His reports from the scene of action again enlightened Europe as to Turkish misrule and incompetency, and contributed not a little to the ultimate solution by which the Turk has been driven back upon the verge of the Balkan peninsula, pending his final expulsion from Europe.

In the service of the "Times," Athens was revisited in 1880. He revisited also the island of Melos, after an interval of a dozen years. A renewed study of the enigma of the famous Venus led Stillman to the belief, whose best ground is in his artistic instinct, that the statue is no Venus, but a Victory, perhaps enshrined in the Temple of Nike Apteros at Athens. The discussion of this question is bound up with his "Ulysses" (1888), the record of an adventurous voyage undertaken in behalf of THE CENTURY MAGAZINE. He also began with ardor the study of Greek archæology, especially in connection with the huge constructions which are styled Pelasgic, and which he has traced more thoroughly than any one, and pictured with his camera, up and down the Italian peninsula, in Sicily, in the Greek archipelago, and on the mainland. In the case of Mycenæ and Tiryns, he has been an unsparing critic of Dr. Schliemann, and so has brought himself into hot water with scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. But hot water is almost his natural element by this time, and he knows what it is to have incurred the resentment of the Florentines for his frank censure of their municipal insanitation, in the columns of the "Times," and to have been caricatured in the comic prints of Athens for his comments, also through the "Thunderer," on the political situation in Greece. Amid all this give and take, no one, happily, has ever accused him of a mercenary thought or a dishonest judgment.

It is not for me to estimate his worth as an artist, or to fix his rank as an art critic and connoisseur, great as is my admiration for the one and respect for the other. Nor must I here particularize the tragic or romantic features of his wedded life, doubly associated with Greece, and subject to the law of his wanderings. At home in divers lands and in divers cities, he is now seemingly a fixture in Rome. As I write, he is approaching his sixty-fifth birthday, and for more than a third of this period I have enjoyed the privilege of his friendship, intimately and without reserve. But it is many years since we have met, and when shall I feel again the affectionate pressure of his hand — no, not the pressure, the confiding touch of palm to palm, the gentlest union of blade and sheath?

Wendell P. Garrison.