

## THE ART OF CHARLES KEENE.

WITH EXAMPLES OF HIS WORK, FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWINGS.



THE MANAGER'S CALL. («PUNCH» AND DISRAELI.)

I THINK that too much cannot now be said about Charles Keene, too much of his work cannot be exhibited, whether in print or elsewhere, as some slight amends for the general indifference which was his portion during life. I need not point out how small a fraction of the popularity of the «Punch» artists fell to him. To the many, «Punch» meant Leech or Dicky Doyle or Du Maurier; only the few looked to it for Keene. The little that has been written about him proves the little that was thought of him. His drawings, as a rule, were received in silence or with a silly guffaw. It is curious to note the attitude of a critic like Mr. Ruskin, who could be so generous in his recognition of lesser men. Mr. George Somes Layard, in his life of the artist, said (and I am unable to disprove his assertion): «Mr. Ruskin did not find that Keene was worthy even to be mentioned

when he took upon himself to discuss the («Punch») artists.» In the lecture on Leech and Tenniel, Keene's name never appears, though there are continuous references to Du Maurier, and he and Leech and Tenniel, and even Lady Butler, Mrs. Allingham, Miss Kate Greenaway, and Miss Alexander, are exalted here or elsewhere. However, Mr. Ruskin could not quite ignore Keene. When, in «Ariadne Florentina» (Vol. VII), he sneers at the illustrators of cheap «Ladies' Pocket-books,» as he has just been praising Du Maurier and the others, it is clear that it can only be Keene who has so incensed him. And Keene again must be the object of Ruskin's wrath in that conveniently forgotten passage in the «Art of England» in which he says: «Cheap popular art cannot draw for you beauty, sense, and honesty; but every species of distorted vice—the idiot, the blackguard, the coxcomb, the paltry fool, the disgraced woman—is pictured for your honourable pleasure on every page. These are thoroughly representative of the entire art industry of the modern press, with clumsy caricature struggling to render its dullness tolerable by insisting on defect—if perchance a penny or two more may be coined out of the cockney reader's itch for loathsomeness.» This delectable sentiment is inspired by illustrated books and magazines and papers of the year 1867 in particular, and in general by all English illustrated books and papers of about the same date. As Charles Keene was among the most distinguished contributors to these publications, it is safe to assume that he came in for a sufficient share of Mr. Ruskin's anathema. But it is neither wise nor fair to judge Mr. Ruskin by any

one of his criticisms. He has an amusing way of contradicting himself, as by this time we all know. Certainly, with charming unconsciousness of the denunciation he had uttered or was going to utter,—I am not sure in what order these lectures were given,—he did not hesitate to confess in «Aratra Pentelici» that it chanced, «as I was preparing this lecture, one of our most able and popular prints gave me a woodcut of the (self-made man,) specified as such, so vigorously drawn, and with so few touches, that Phidias or Turner himself could scarcely have done it better»; and the woodcut—really a wood-engraving—which thus charms him, and is worthy to be ranked with Phidias and to be compared to a Greek coin, is the work

of Charles Keene, printed in «Punch.» The man whom Mr. Ruskin, so far as I know, cannot condescend to mention by name, is thus set up by him to complete the trinity of his greatest gods! These are inconsistencies of criticism, it might be thought, better forgotten; but they help one to understand why Keene was so little known to the public, while draftsmen of very much less merit were glorified. Is it any wonder that English art and English criticism are a laughing-stock to the world, when such pronouncements can be seriously delivered from a professorial chair, and even more seriously printed with the official sanction of the University of Oxford?

But if Keene, as the most accomplished



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draftsman in England, was never rightly recognized, there seems to be a prevailing impression that this was a matter of indifference to him. I am not able to analyze the mental attitude of an artist, to «reconstruct his psychology,» by scientific study of his work. But still, for all that has been written and said about Keene's indifference, for all the proof that his own letters may be declared to give, I cannot help thinking his supposed independence of appreciation something of a pose, concealing beneath it a feeling more akin to despair, which grew upon him with years of continued neglect. In writing of him, it has been pleasanter to speak, as one may now speak freely, of his delightful personality—of his quaint traits, of his love for music, of his more or less eccentric habits; of his dogs, his bagpipes, his clays; of the fact that he hardly ever rode in a hansom cab, and often cooked his own dinner in his studio. Why not forget the discreditable truth that when alive he was all but unknown; that to most people the initials «C. K.» meant nothing, the drawing

—unless of his tipsy men and Sandies—less, and the legend below everything, especially when quite pointless and unintelligible, as supplied to him by the professional purveyors of jokes? And after all, you are reminded, in England artists at least always knew his value, while he was for long received and respected on the Continent. If this be true, then certainly English artists had a curious fashion of expressing their pleasure and belief in his work. It was all very well, after his death, for Lord Leighton to utter platitudes about him; all very well to revive the legend that he had actually once been invited to an Academy dinner. But if there is any history to be written about the Royal Academy of Arts during the last thirty years, it will be to record that James McNeill Whistler, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Charles Keene were not of it—a scandal no white-washing by lord mayors, presidents, and prime ministers can remove.

Nor, indeed, was Keene appreciated, as the report is, on the Continent. At the time of his death he had barely been heard of in France, despite the gold medal awarded him at the exhibition of 1889; for at that time M. Jacques Blanche could only hope that «prochainement il sera découvert à Paris . . . par quelqu'un de nos hardis lanceurs de nouveautés et déclaré homme de génie.» This was written after the Universal Exhibition. And it was also a few years after his death that Bracquemond (who, with Blanche, had got to know him, not from the pages of «Punch,» but from casual visits to London), wrote, «Keene est peu connu en France,» though the eminent etcher thinks he is worthy to rank with Daumier, with Gavarni. Even Béraldi, whose monumental «Graveurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle» gives him a position of authority in France, says: «Keene est de ceux que la critique met du temps à découvrir. Son nom n'est pas crié sur les toits.» Those are the verdicts of three of his French admirers, and the only other article about him I have been able to find in a French journal was contributed by an Englishman. I do not believe that the German



PROBABLY A STUDY FOR «PUNCH.»

public showed itself more sympathetic. The friendliness of Menzel is accepted as a sign of Keene's popularity in Germany. But the Menzel episode, as I heard the story from Keene's own lips, points to anything but a triumph in the studios of Berlin. As a tribute of his admiration of the German, Keene sent several of his drawings to Menzel. In return, and after an unflatteringly long interval, Menzel presented photographs and proofs of his own work—and eventually, I believe, some originals—to Keene. However, Keene was too generous to go into these details in any of his letters; it was only in terms of sincere eulogy that he could write or speak of the great illustrator.

There is the less excuse for the public's unanimity in ignoring him since the one phase of his art hitherto given to the public is his illustrations, essentially the most popular. The current impression is that if you look through the back numbers of «Punch,» and an occasional old magazine or book, you have learned all there is to be learned about Charles Keene as an artist. But this is by no means the case. His work may be divided properly—though the division has never been made—into two classes: that done, in one medium or another, for his own

study and delight; and that intended for publication. You may imagine, if you have not seen examples of the former class, that the engravings in «Punch» represent him fully and satisfactorily. Unfortunately, for the artist, they do not: for me, however, fortunately, as it is the reason I now have the pleasure of showing that there existed an entirely different artist, drawing in a style absolutely apart from that foisted upon him by the wood-engraver.

I shall begin by speaking of the unpublished work. These are chiefly costume poses which he drew at the Langham Sketching Club, and a series of studies done mostly in pen and ink, with a firm yet exquisitely delicate touch, portraits, or drawings of landscape and architecture, done for pure delight in the subject, though many afterward appear as backgrounds in his published designs. Much credit has been given to Keene and some of his contemporaries because they actually took the trouble to go to nature for the backgrounds of their illustrations. Frankly, I cannot see that they deserve great glory for doing only what every true artist does. It was no surprise to me to find a large number of landscapes among Keene's unpublished drawings. One has only to look at the moors and meadows and hills that stretch away beyond his gillies and rustics and sportsmen to be sure they were never faked. But I was amazed at the beauty and perfection of execution he put into these sketches. Some, drawn with a pen in old sketch-books, often on a nasty blue paper, are delicate and exquisite to a degree that makes me fear they must ever remain single works of art, so entirely are they beyond the possibility of any method of reproduction. However, there was another means of expression, capable of even greater delicacy and refinement, with the multiplication of a design as its chief end, of which Keene was master—etching. His few plates are as varied in subject as his drawings. Landscapes, Langham models, portraits—all these he drew with his needle. But from most of his plates so few proofs have been printed that his etchings have virtually escaped even the dealer and the collector.

The unpublished drawings may be arranged under several different heads. Those which, in a way, can most appropriately be considered first are the life studies—studies from the nude. They are owned chiefly by the South Kensington Museum, where they are bound up in a small portfolio.

They are all frankly for practice, for

study. A small proportion are in color. Many of the designs are excellent. The Langham studies of men in armor and costume are admirable, even if they cannot be compared to Menzel's. There are little heads so full of character and so good technically that they alone should give him high rank as a painter in water-colors—a medium in which his work was never known, though that of men far his inferior was lauded to the skies. I know of only two or three works in oil by him; but I have seen a few in distemper.

He did a few charcoal-drawings. As I look at them, I read in every line and tone the influence of Menzel, which he would have been eager and proud to acknowledge. And I realize also that they are not surpassed by Menzel's drawings in the same medium; that they are no less varied in subject and execution.

Artists who could appreciate Keene knew that he had produced a series of etched plates; but they probably might not have been able to tell you how many of these there were. M. Bérardi catalogues twenty, but there are really nearer forty. Keene himself was so delightfully vague that he seemed to think there were only about a dozen—too few to be catalogued seriously. «I am amused at the idea of putting me down as a (Graveur du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle),» he wrote to Mrs. Edwin Edwards, in a letter quoted by Mr. Layard; «I have only scratched a few studies of sketches, not more than a dozen, all told, I should think—the merest experiments. Titles they have not. To save my life, I could n't tell the dates. And as to writing my life! (Story! God bless you, sir, I've none to tell.) A quotation to that effect. The most stirring incidents in my life are a visit to the dentist (date forgotten), and certain experiences of the last few days. Try to choke the French biographer off.»

The etchings may be grouped under four heads: studies at the Langham and from models, portraits, landscapes, and one humorous subject. As with his drawings, it is impossible to trace any progress, any development. They are the work of an accomplished artist with whom etching was but another responsive medium. If three or four are not successful, it is because they were meant to be elaborated, to be carried much further, and without the intended elaboration they are simply uninteresting. Among the Langham studies, a model with a 'cello is the most distinguished. Though in subject it might suggest Meissonier, in handling



CULTURE FOR THE WORKING-CLASSES.

PHILANTHROPIC EMPLOYER (who has paid his workpeople's expenses to a neighboring Fine Art Exhibition). Well, Johnson, what did you think of it? Pick up an idea or two?

FOREMAN: Well, you see, sir, it were a this way. When us got there, we was a-considering what was best to be done, so we app'nted a deputation o' three on us, to see what it were like, an' when they come out an' said it were only picturs an' such, we thought it a pity to spend our shillin's on 'em. So we went to the Tea Gardens, and very pleasant it were too. Thank you kindly, sir.

there is a suppleness and a painter-like quality of line that the more celebrated artist never approached in his life. And it is astonishing that a man who etched so little had such a command of the richness and depth of color to be obtained from a copper-plate. This, and the woman in the costume of Elizabeth, seated, at her side a lute, in a corner the head of an artist leaning over his drawing, are both signed, so I suppose Keene considered them finished and was pleased with them. It is curious to note that on some of the plates he recorded the number of bitings and the time which each took.

But of all his etchings, none can surpass the portraits. The finest, I think, is one of Edwin Edwards, seated in a garden chair, under a tree, reading a book. The way the man sprawls at his ease, as Keene had probably seen him sprawl hundreds of times, is wonderfully expressed with the finest and most eloquent lines. There is a second portrait of Mr. Edwards, this time painting, and a charming study of Mrs. Edwards. No less charming is the portrait of another lady,—on a lounge in front of a richly figured wall-paper. In this even the old-fashioned bell-pull, even the picture on the wall, as in Mr. Whistler's portrait of his mother, become

important in the wonderful scheme of decoration; and the color is richer, more effective, more deliberately introduced as an essential quality, than was the rule in his plates. It is unsigned. There are several other etchings—none lovelier than the female figure seated with a book, and dressed in the great voluminous skirts of the sixties, held out by the swaying crinoline which Mr. Morris would have had us believe is not beautiful, which Whistler and Millais and Boyd Houghton have shown us was far more graceful than the shapeless draggleries of a later, esthetic generation. Their drawings and Keene's etchings will endure; the opinion of Morris, when confronted with them, must prove but empty words. It is something to be thankful for that, in his drawing of women, Keene did not become a tiresome, mannered conventionalist like Du Maurier.

When the Keene Exhibition was held at the Fine Arts Society, a few years since, besides the more familiar «Punch» designs on the walls there were portfolios containing a few pen-and-ink drawings of figures—mostly single figures—and of landscapes, done with a touch so delicate and so refined that no wood-engraver, unless he were a master like



HOUSE NEXT TO CHARLES KEENE'S IN HAMMERSMITH.

Timothy Cole, could have engraved them on the wood block; at any rate, no Englishman ever did. An admirable example is the seated figure with a veil, published here. Others are drawings of landscape and architecture, like the suburban villa—next, I believe, to his mother's place in Hammersmith. Almost all the landscapes are as English in subject as his illustrations. Those I have seen were mostly in sketch-books, made with a small steel pen and usually with pure black or slightly browned ink, which he carried in an exciseman's bottle hung from his waistcoat button. Mr. Stacy Marks says that he drew straight away in ink, «without any preliminary pencilling as a means of obtaining certainty and sureness of hand.» He was very particular in selecting the sketch-books, which were of old Whatman or thin white papers, or of that pale blue used by our fathers for correspondence. In his very early work for the wood-engraver you can see that Keene was influenced more or less by Leech, whose drawings could be engraved, I imagine, fairly well. They were far bolder and simpler, much less artistic, and vastly more popular than Keene's.

Keene's style of drawing for publication became bolder and bolder as time went on. For his own pleasure he continued to make with his pen little masterpieces which, in their refinement, are worthy to rank with the

etchings of Rembrandt and Whistler. In his studies—and he made innumerable studies for «Punch» pictures—he never varied his handling. But when working for «Punch» he either began to think more about the engraver, or else despaired of him and gave him up as hopeless; and that this latter was the case is implied in the few references to the subject in his letters. «They'll spoil it in the engraving, but you shall have the drawing,» he wrote of a certain design to Mr. Crawhall, from whom the subject had been obtained. And to the same friend he maintained his belief «that Bewick was a greater artist than wood-engraver, and that he worked in and was hampered by an ungrateful material. . . . We have not beaten the old masters of wood-engraving (wood-cutting), in my opinion, but have tried to do too much and failed.» Would he not have modified this opinion had masters like Cole and Juengling, Florian and Baude, been his interpreters? By 1866 all the refinement which was at least attempted before has vanished from the «Punch» drawings. Instead of the elaborate cross-hatching by which the modeling and the fleshy look of his faces were obtained, short straight lines have been substituted, and a more open cross-hatching in the background, in striking contrast to the delicate, beautiful, tender studies, impossible to reproduce, made by him for the finished illustrations.

In conclusion, I should like to say a few words about Keene's work generally. As some one has written, there is in it a wonderful feeling for character, a sense of movement and proportion, and a suggestion of living things in living nature. It is in this power of making things live that Charles Keene excelled; that he is the equal of any of the world's master draftsmen. Though all his figures are studied, they are never, in his finished compositions, mere models posing. They are doing what he wanted them to do, and he has seized them at the appropriate, the most expressive moment. He had no scheme, as some one else has pointed out, to which country and town must be reduced, no formula for the expression of day or night. For, as he himself said, and the saying does not lose by repetition, «If you can draw anything, you can draw everything.» You can even make the political cartoon a thing of interest to other people besides those delineated in it; and though his few attempts as cartoonist may be unintelligible in subject, they are interesting in design. He felt everything he drew, and he often acted his subjects and posed for himself. Though the earlier drawings are so elaborate, and the later ones, or the engravings from them, so simple, all are right. His drawings also have been praised for their straightforwardness, their economy of line. I do not know whether this is a merit or a misfortune.

Beauty, his critics like to lament, he could not see; his eyes, they think, were quite blind to it—not knowing the trouble to be in their own short-sightedness. It was left for one ingenious writer to put the general verdict into words, and to declare, after the artist's death, that Keene «failed in the portrayal of beauty, elegance, respectability. A pretty woman never lurked about the point of his pencil,»—how could she? might one venture to ask,—«as she does so delightfully about those of his principal

collaborators on (Punch.) His gentlemen are snobs; his aristocracy and his clerks are cast in the same vulgar mold; and his brides are forbidding models of virtue, perhaps, but lacking every outward feminine charm.» The true beauty in his drawings must necessarily be hidden from such writers. The artist knows well enough that there is beauty, and of many kinds, in Keene's drawings—greatest of all, beauty in the method of expression, in every line set down, whether it gives the sweep of the wide moorland or the repeated house-fronts shutting in a London street; the greasy creases in Robert's coat, or the rags hanging about the little guttersnipe. And beauty there is, too, in his landscapes,—masterpieces many of them are,—and in his people, the women in voluminous skirts, the little girls in simple frocks. And, above all, there is the beauty essential to show character, however hideous in itself, or insignificant in a mere moral or social aspect. And that he could draw the typically beautiful woman when he wished, his unpublished work proves.

And his humor! Because he did not always invent his legends, he was no humorist, it has



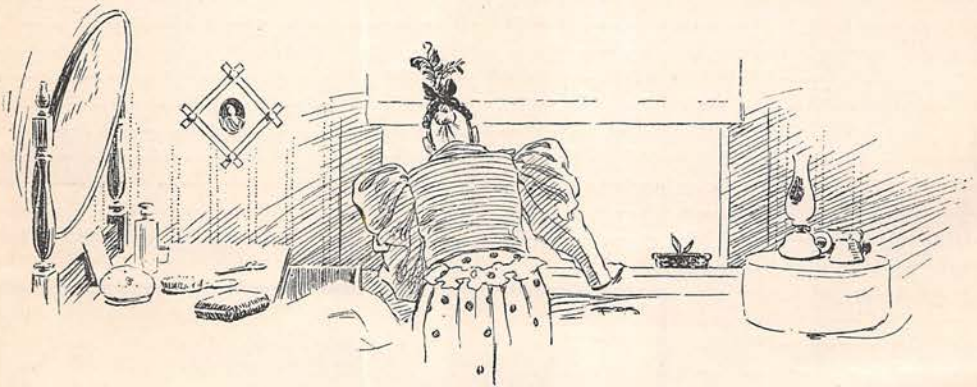
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been argued. True, his drawings did not, like Gavarni's, depend equally for their wit and meaning upon the lines written below, these, more often than not, being the contribution or creation of a friend. But the humor is in the drawing, which needs no literary interpretation. His figures, his faces, his groups tell their story—a story of delightfully humorous quality, though not as brilliantly satirical as Gavarni's, nor, perhaps, as romantically audacious as Daumier's. His humor was more kindly, more genial, more sympathetic; never fantastic, seldom whimsical; the humor rather of a man who could

see, and found his pleasure in seeing, his fellow-men as they are,—weak, foolish, vain, pert, pretentious, as it might be,—but who loved them none the less for it.

Besides this, in none of his drawings is there the slightest shadow of the vulgarity—the appalling vulgarity—that humorists like Rowlandson and Gillray substituted for the cleaner, because frank, indecency of the French draftsman. He was not a Zola, for all his realism; he was not a Phidias, with all due deference to Mr. Ruskin. He was just «C. K.», the greatest English artist since Hogarth.

*Joseph Pennell.*



«(YOU 'D NEVER SEE A SINGLE SIGHT ON EARTH!)»

## THE FLIRTING OF MR. NICKINS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF «STORIES OF A SANCTIFIED TOWN.»

WITH PICTURES BY F. D. STEELE.

IT was Sunday morning, and church-time at the Station. Mrs. Garry was tying on her bonnet before the looking-glass of her bureau, which article of furniture she had turned a little aslant in order that she might, while dressing, enjoy a reflected view of the people coming up the street to church. She stopped, with her bonnet-strings half tied, to thrust her head out of the window at her side, as if she saw something that demanded a more direct scrutiny. She drew her head back, and called excitedly, «Ed Garry! Come quick!»

Mr. Garry appeared in the kitchen door, with an old gun-barrel and a ramrod in his hands, and a frown of remonstrance on his face. «You know I 'm busy, Marg'et,» he grumbled.

«Ed Garry,» she exclaimed, «you know if it was n't for me you 'd never see a single

sight on earth! You come here to this window!»

Thus adjured, he made slow haste across the room.

She pushed his head and shoulders out of the window. «I wish to goodness,» she said, «you 'd look at that Tommy T. Nickins a-stepping up that street!»

Mr. Garry uttered a contemptuous groan, and attempted a retreat.

His better half held him fast. «I tell you to look!» she continued, with growing excitement. «Look at them pointed shoes, and that new suit, and that hat, and that there necktie! Oh, my goodness gracious alive! And that cane! Oh, if Almira May could rise up! It's a sin and a shame, him setting out, and her not dead in her grave three months. Yes; that's the way you men forget us, Ed Garry.» She shook Mr. Garry by