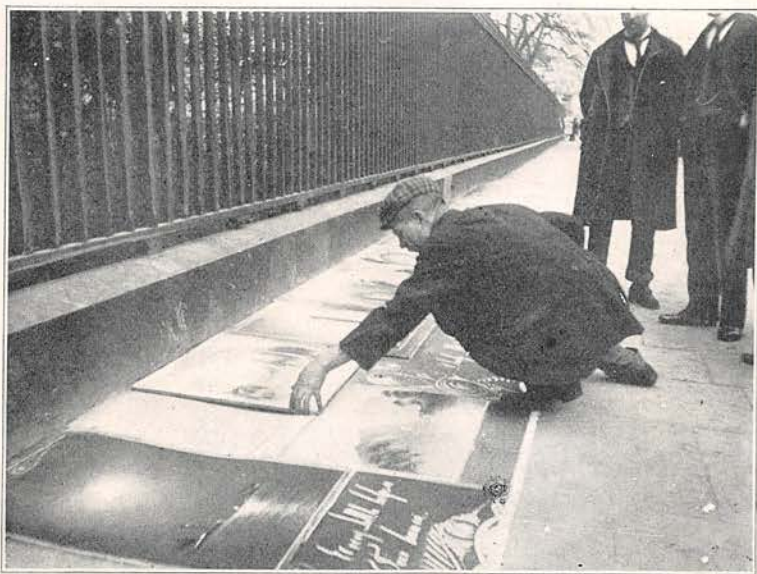


PAVEMENT-ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK.

By C. L. McCLUER STEVENS.

THE name and fame of the first pavement-artist, like that of the premier oyster-eater, is buried in oblivion. Probably he was some broken-down dauber, who, after vainly aspiring to better things, found himself forced by stern necessity to

For the pavement-artist is a creature of modern growth. True, we have only negative evidence as to the time when, and the place where, he first began to inflict his caricatures of art upon a long-suffering public. But as no mention what-



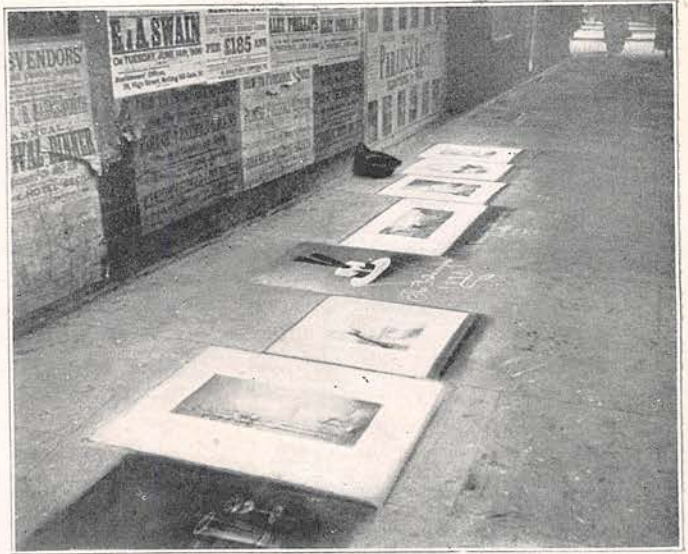
THE HANGING COMMITTEE.

appeal to his prospective patrons in this humble and unconventional manner. Anyhow, he builded better than he knew. Someone, somewhere, once wrote something anent the streets being the picture-galleries of the proletariat. There was a world of meaning in the phrase then; but it has been reserved for the pavement-artist, in these latter days, to lend to it a new and hitherto undreamt-of significance.

ever is made of him in that exceedingly interesting and eminently exhaustive book, "London Labour and the London Poor," it may safely be assumed that he had no existence in the days of the Brothers Mayhew. One of the oldest pavement-artists with whom I have been brought in contact declares, indeed, that the father of the craft was one Paddy Keogh, who little more than forty years ago kept an

unpretentious open-air picture-gallery in the then notorious Ratcliffe Highway. For a time he had the field practically to himself; but success begat imitators. The new-comers had no canvas nor money to purchase any, so they chose the sidewalk as their *atelier*, and inscribed their sketches on the bare flags. The "art" spread westward. The pavements of Belgravia blossomed forth incontinently into blue and red and white replicas of famous works. Landseers and Turners in crayon vied with Claudes in chalk and Canalettis in colours. Then came the era of the cut salmon on the dish and the impossible sunset, as being easier of accomplishment. Lastly, men were found so lost to all sense of honour as to hire their sketches at so much a day, and coax the elusive penny from the pockets of the fickle public by a display of work which was in no sense their own.

The genuine pavement-artist, however, considers these latter individuals unworthy even of contempt. The old fellow, for



EXHIBITION OF FIXED AND MOVABLE PICTURES.

instance, who for nearly a couple of decades has taken up his "pitch" outside Hyde Park, near the Marble Arch, is so anxious not to be identified with these pariahs of the "profession" that he will at once proceed to sketch, for the delectation of any doubter, a duplicate of any one of his "pictures."

An old sailor, whose usual "pitch" is at the New Oxford Street end of Shaftesbury Avenue, has recently introduced a novel variation of the familiar stereotyped class of picture. They are picked out with Berlin wool on perforated canvas, the "artist" performing the work as he sits in the sun in full view of the passers-by. His



"THE ONLY WOMAN PAVEMENT-ARTIST IN LONDON."

average takings, he informed me, were about two shillings a day; but he occasionally sells a picture or two, his patrons being mostly seafaring men like himself.

"The only woman pavement-artist in London," as she proudly dubs



A MARINE PAINTER.



THE ROYAL ACADEMY, BLOOMSBURY PAVEMENT.

herself, is usually to be found at the back of St. Martin's Church, immediately opposite the Lowther Arcade. The pictures—such as they are—are all her own work. This young lady places her earnings as high as five shillings a day, "taking one day with another." But this average, I discovered, applies only to the days when she is able to exhibit. Wet weather is the bugbear of the pavement-artists, for then they

cannot show at all. Even a smart shower is quite sufficient to undo the work of hours, and the poor "artist" has to begin all over again. No wonder that the movable pictures, which can be packed up and carried under cover on the approach of bad weather, are growing in favour among the fraternity!



LOAN EXHIBITION OF "GENUINE OIL PAINTINGS" (NO DOUBT ABOUT THE OIL) AT SIXPENCE A DAY.

Of this class are the two last Illustrations shown herewith, which were snapped outside St. George's Church, Hart Street, Bloomsbury. These particular exhibits are genuine oil-paintings; and the exhibitor admitted candidly, when questioned, that he hired them at "six-pence a day, or two 'bob' a week." There were, he stated, at least a round dozen of artists in London who make a speciality of painting these daubs for the purpose of letting them out on hire. A new-comer, or one who happens to be unknown to the "master-man," has to pay—in addition, of course, to the hiring fee—a deposit commensurate with the presumed value of the pictures temporarily entrusted to his care. By paying a slightly increased weekly rental, the pictures become the property of the hirer after a certain specified time. As a general rule, however, this latest development of the hire-purchase system finds no great favour in the eyes of those most immediately concerned; one reason being that a pavement picture-gallery, if it is to prove anything like a drawing card nowadays, must be up-to-date. The pavement-artist-patronising public is becoming satiated with sliced salmon and crossed mackerel. Even scenes from the Jubilee celebrations or the latest and most blood-curdling thing in Armenian atrocities are at a discount. On the other hand, an enterprising peripatetic who recently portrayed on an Islington pavement a highly coloured and ditto imaginative picture of the destruction

of Admiral Cervera's fleet at Santiago was rewarded with a record day's takings.

The dreariest thing about the pavement-artist's work is its dead level of badness. Once or twice in a lifetime one may see a glimmering of talent, but the general result is below—far below—mediocrity. We have heard of the great singer, the great violinist, who began in the streets, but the romantic artist-career which began on the pavement is still sadly to seek.

The mottoes which the pavement decorator scrawls around hearts, Yarmouth bloters, hams, and sirloins are of the same

monotonous character. They usually consist of a bowdlerised version of the Beatitudes, the favourite being, "Blessed is the heart that can feel for another," varied by, "Please spare a copper," and "These are all my own



ANOTHER INDUBITABLE "OIL."

work." As we have seen, the last legend is sometimes of the nature of a fraud scarcely of the pious order. The most curious thing about this art is the kindly consideration it receives from the public, who always refrain from treading upon it. Thus it really constitutes a serious obstruction, but one so obviously intangible that the policeman generally fails to detect it. So the pavement-artist sits still.

The *doyen* of the lending-out branch of this peculiar business appears to be an old one-armed scene-painter, who lives in the Mile-End Road. Looking at his work, the thought naturally suggests itself that if he is able to paint such daubs with one arm, what dreadful atrocity might he not perpetrate with two!