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## WHISTLER IN PAINTING AND ETCHING.

JAMES A. M. WHISTLER. (AFTER THE PORTRAIT BY HIMSELF.)

IT is doubtless in part owing to his suit with Mr. Ruskin, that Mr. Whistler's name should have recently become so familiar to persons who are usually unaccustomed to take much interest in the personality of painters, or the peculiarities of paintings.



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Little else save notoriety can be said to have come of that much celebrated cause so far as Mr. Whistler is concerned. It may have served to fix and illustrate the general opinion of Mr. Ruskin's habit, the habit of swift and unreflecting censure or eulogy. But the orbit in which Mr. Ruskin's criticism revolves is known to be an eccentric one, which no ascertained laws direct, and no one at this date could have been astonished at a criticism of his, which consisted of terming the painter of a picture, a cockney and a coxcomb. And the general opinion of Mr. Whistler's work cannot be said to have been affected by it, except in so far as it, and the suit it led to, made a sensation in a domain in which a slighter incident than is elsewhere necessary, suffices to attract popular attention and awaken popular interest—the domain of amateur æstheticism. A sensation herein they did unquestionably produce, however; and for the discourse of many excellent people upon impressionism, and literalism, and idealization, and naturalness in art, Mr. Whistler now furnishes a pivot. Probably his work has in no degree been prejudiced by Mr. Ruskin's characterization of the moral qualities of its author, but it is nevertheless now accepted as typical, and made to stand for a class of art, or at least a manner of painting, of which the friends and foes are ardent and fluent. The circumstance that it is typical only in the most superficial way, and that in every vital way it is almost unique, justifies some attempt to consider it seriously, and to distinguish it from the semblance into which amateur æstheticism has confidently distorted it. Amateur æstheticism is, to be sure, just at present occupied mainly with M. Zola and naturalism in fiction, but it has probably not yet lost its interest in its previous sensation, and only needs the provocation of a fresh exhibition of paintings to recur to the Arch-impressionist.

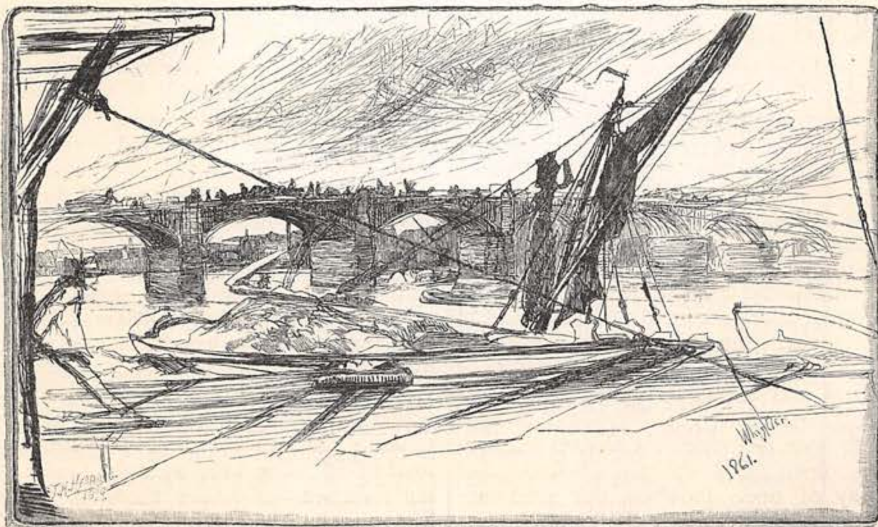
It is difficult to get at precisely what is meant by "impressionism," as the word is popularly used. What is probably meant by it is that manner of painting which produces what are apparently Chinese puzzles—pictorial riddles, capable or not of solution, after due experiment on the part of the observer. If the observer finds himself, after conscientious effort, unable to make anything out of a picture, if to him its lines are confused and its color unmeaning, he calls it an impressionist picture, and gives up his attempt, generally in dudgeon. He assumes that the painter is affected,—is "a cockney and a coxcomb," perhaps,—and asks with irony if "blurs" and "splotches of paint" are to be called pictures, and if nature ever looks like "a paint-box struck by lightning." If, on the contrary, he does succeed in discovering the meaning of the painter, the delight which he experiences in recognizing the significance of lines and lights which a moment before were obscure to him, persuades him swiftly, though it may be insensibly, that such significance is admirable. The notion that the effort expended in reducing a confused mass of pigment to order and purpose might, after all, be a profitless effort, is too disheartening to be entertained by, or even to occur to, most people. And, therefore, it happens that ordinary persons, who can never make out "puzzle-pictures" on advertising cards, to say nothing of "faces in the fire," pronounce impressionist pictures daubs, and ordinary persons with more flexible powers of vision assume that impressionist pictures are beautiful. Satisfaction at having "made them out" is mistakenly referred to the charms of the picture. To both these, mistaking miscellany for monotony, Fortuny, with all the abuse of detail which most critics find in him, is probably an impressionist. And to neither is the real significance of such a painter as Fortuny, or of a true impressionist, such as Dégas or Apol, at all evident. To these, what Mr. Hamerton in a recent article has to say concerning "impressionism" may afford some illumination. "The impressionists," he says, "are a new sect, composed, as all new sects in painting invariably are, of young men who have not yet definitively formed their styles. The principle of their work is not, in itself, either inartistic or unphilosophical, considered as an interpretation of nature; but it involves the sacrifice of very much which has hitherto helped to make the strength of art. They go to nature and receive an impression (whence the title they give themselves), and the purpose of their art is to render the impression as a whole, without either the painful study of parts or any scientific arrangement of material." In other words, "impressionism" implies, first of all, impatience of detail. And, so far, Mr. Whistler may justly be called an impressionist—as, indeed, may a great many other painters whose bones were dust long before "impressionism" was heard of. But to associate him with "a new sect, composed of young men who have not yet definitively formed their style," would be absurd; and an intimation that his works are lacking in

PORTRAIT OF THE PAINTER'S MOTHER ("ARRANGEMENT IN BLACK AND GRAY").

the study of parts or arrangement of material, would be false. It is, indeed, his purpose to render his impression as a whole; his study of parts is not apparently painful, and his arrangement of material is not obviously scientific. And he does, indeed,—in Mr. Hamerton's rather elephantine phrase, —"go to nature and receive an impression." But the absence of selection, of ideal generalization, of a sense of composition, form, color, which more or less characterizes the "new sect," is conspicuously uncharacteristic of Mr. Whistler. Nothing is more foreign to his genius than association with any "sect," or sympathy with any creed, or conformity to any fixed and formulated rules. And association of him with the impressionists, except in so far as all the great painters are impressionists, would, of course, not occur to Mr. Hamerton; but it occurs to the ordinary amateur, because he sees some of the same superficial characteristics in both. He reads Mr. Whistler's testimony that it took him "a couple of days" to paint the "Nocturne in Black and Gold;" he reads of the large brushes that Mr. Whistler uses; of his table, covered with daubs of paint, which does duty as a palette; and he is unable to distinguish in Mr. Whistler's pictures details which he would never think of distinguishing in an analogous natural scene; he forgets that these pictures are the results of "the knowledge gained through a lifetime;" and he concludes that Mr. Whistler is an impressionist, and, in virtue of his notoriety, the arch-impressionist. Accordingly, his judgment of him is very nearly measured by his capacity for "making out faces in the fire." Upon the whole, then, the first step toward an understanding of Mr. Whistler's genius,—toward a recognition that not how he paints but what he means is the important point to determine, and that he may paint as rapidly and with as large brushes as he chooses so long as his painting is his legitimate expression,—is to

abandon the notion that he is, in any technical sense, to be called an impressionist.

In the little pamphlet which Mr. Whistler published after his Cadmean triumph over Mr. Ruskin he was very severe with lay criticism of art, and expressed small respect for the "man of taste." Culture seems to meet with even less favor at his hands than with so sinewy a person as Mr. Frederick Harrison, who is broad enough to admit that it is a serviceable quality, perhaps, for "a critic of new books." He replies to the objecting inquiry as to what would become of painting if it were publicly let alone by saying: the same thing that happens to mathematics. "Let work be received in silence," he advises. Considering the impossibility of executing the reform suggested, however, Mr. Whistler's advocacy of it seems profitless. People of taste will probably continue to write about pictures if they know how to express themselves and imagine that they have anything to express. And if what they write pleases the painters, the painters will continue to rejoice that they did not keep silence, and, if not, will continue to lament its inadequacy and its ignorance. But there is no general rule to be laid down about the matter, even if one could, by the writing of pamphlets or in any other way, get it conformed to, after its formulation. At least any rule must be of the least intimate application imaginable. Certainly Mr. Whistler's implication that if we are obliged to have art critics at all they should be artists themselves, will hardly answer; and when Mr. Whistler seeks to illustrate the absurdity of any deviation from this by instancing the absurdity of Mr. Tennyson presiding over a medical examining board, every one recognizes that his illustration is not really analogous, and only seems to be. Every one will still be glad that Goethe was not estopped from writing "art criticism," and that Mr. Pater and M. Taine have occupied themselves with it so much; even that Mr. Ruskin did not become the evangelical minister that he was designed to be. Curiously enough, by the way, it is his being more or less technically an artist himself that has twisted Mr. Ruskin's own criticism; his technical prejudices do not permit his "taste" to exercise its proper function of presiding in his reflections. If lay criticism could be confined to general criticism, to the philosophy and dialectics of art, about which it is the experience, probably, of every man of cultivation that artists know so little, it would possibly be an advantage, though Mr. Whistler of course would not make even this concession. But evidently that is a matter to be left to the individual lay critic himself, to his conscientiousness and his cultivation. One can imagine few cultivated people incompetent to express a just opinion upon the technique of many of our American academicians, and it is impossible not to see that the connection between a painter's genius and his technique is so vital and intimate that an estimate of the one involves a criticism, slight or searching, of the other. It would be difficult, for example, to decide how far the difference between Mr. Church and Mr. Bierstadt consisted in a difference of genius and




ETCHING: "VAUXHALL BRIDGE."

how far in a difference of technique. And to get at the difference between the two a lay critic would be necessary, for the painters would never show it to us, even if they should be forced to admit its undeniable existence. And these qualities it is the tendency of general cultivation to stimulate, and of special training to check; and so the more the criticism of painting is diverted from essentials, as the painters would tend to divert it,—since

"AT THE PIANO."

Still, it is undoubtedly true that lay critics do often overstep the line which divides general and essential criticism from technical criticism, the criticism of mere phenomena concerning which, though they are not seldom at variance, the painters may be called the only experts. And it is certainly exasperating. Only, the exasperation of Mr. Whistler and the painters is, it should be observed, not very much keener than the irritation of every cultivated person when ignorance and incompetency are evinced—perhaps not at all keener, if the personal element in the matter is eliminated, and of course it should be eliminated. On the whole, criticism is perhaps the one department of human effort in which special erudition is dangerous. It is dangerous, and very often, as Mr. Whistler may possibly admit in Mr. Ruskin's case, because in criticism what is needed above all is openness, balance, the free play of one's faculties, the predominance of the intuitive over the logical spirit. as experts they would not meddle with matters without their sphere, such as the philosophy of art,—the worse it will be as criticism; and the more it is diverted from the passing phenomena of painting, the better it will be.

Into all discussions of this kind the instance of Titian enters as an illustration. Painters are never tired of telling us of Titian's technique, and instructing us that, but for them, we should know nothing of one of his most admirable and most characteristic qualities. That is very just, and one cannot have too much knowledge of and practice in rendering objects, in order to appreciate one phase of this quality, let us say. But the world in general knows nothing of technique. How unfortunate therefore would the world in general be if it were thrown back upon the painters, of whom there is only now and then a Fromentin, instead of being able as it is, to get from lay criticism—of which there is a whole literature in itself about Titian—some idea

of the wonderful pictorial serenity and fullness of Titian. Or, if Titian is an infelicitous illustration, take the contemporary and unimpeachable illustration of Mr. Whistler. In the trial of his suit with Mr. Ruskin, the witnesses were mainly painters, and their testimony furnished a criticism upon Mr. Whistler's later works, of just the description which alone Mr. Whistler admits—expert criticism, professional criticism. It was not elaborate, it is true, but it was indicative of what an elaborate criticism from the same sources would be. Suppose we were forced to get our estimate of Mr. Whistler from this criticism. We should learn from Mr. Burne-Jones, for twenty years a painter, and for many a distinguished painter, that one of Mr. Whistler's latest works was "an admirable beginning of a work of art, a sketch, in short;" that in respect of color it was "a beautiful sketch," but that it was "deficient in form, and form is as important as color;" that it did not show "the finish of a complete work of art in any sense whatever," and that "neither in composition, detail nor form, had the picture any quality whatever." From Mr. Frith, whose æsthetic sense allowed him to become the author of the "The Railway Station," "Derby Day," "The Rake's Progress," and the like performances, we should learn that one of the pictures spoken of had "a beautiful tone of color," but that "the color does not represent any more than you could get from a bit of wall paper or silk," and that altogether the painting was not "a serious work of art,"—in contradistinction to the "Derby Day," possibly. From Mr. Albert Moore we should learn that the same picture was "a work of most consummate art"; that it "had a large aim not often followed," and that in it Mr. Whistler succeeded marvelously in "painting the air." We should be perplexed evidently, but supposing the three critics unanimous, and suppose their judgment elaborated, we should get from them—what? Any idea of Mr. Whistler's place in contemporary art? Any notion of the precise nature of his genius, of his aim in painting and its value, and of his success in attaining his aim? Not at all. Simply a notion of how he paints, and whether or no his way of painting is a good way. For that we are grateful, assuredly; but the point is, that with the world in general, we ask for the character and value of Mr. Whistler's art, and are instructed concerning his method of expressions. Mr. Albert Moore does indeed give us a glimpse of something other than this, in saying that Mr. Whistler has "a large aim not often followed," and if he had continued he would doubtless have pointed out the essential traits of Mr. Whistler's genius as well as his success in painting the air. But Mr. Moore is very far from being merely a painter. He is indeed to our mind the most delightful of living English painters, the painter who, of all his contemporary countrymen, comes naturally and unaffectedly nearest to the matchless grace of Greek art, and the half-sensuous, half-reflective charm of the great Italians. But he is also a painter in whom general cultivation is as distinct a quality as special aptitude and training. The painter-critic who would most abound if painters should undertake criticism is represented, not by Mr. Moore with his delicately just perceptions and wide horizon, but by Mr. Frith with his contracted powers of vision and his concentration upon ways and means.

Ways and means the lay critic will, however, do well to let alone—so far as it is possible to do so. Two things only need concern him,—the value of a painter's conceptions and the adequacy of his expression of them. He may leave it to Mr. Burne-Jones to require that Mr. Whistler's expression should be more than relatively adequate, and to lay down absolute rules about "finish." He will be the less hampered in trying to get some idea of Mr. Whistler's genius, and the value of it. And, as it is a genius of very striking qualities, no one proceeding in this way and not smothered in considerations of technique can fail to get some idea of it. The qualities of few painters are so distinct, and indeed one is tempted to say aggressive. Every one will perceive in his slightest etching an effectiveness, an impressiveness, a force which may or may not justly be called eccentric, but which it is impossible not to recognize as original. More than almost any other contemporary painter that occurs to one, he seems to have been impressed by something, to have been harder hit than most. Less than any other, perhaps, is he concerned about the environment of an effect. His impression is manifestly always distinct, single and pictorial. It is so far from sophistication that it seems almost unreflective. It is indeed absolutely spontaneous, but it has the air of spontaneity unrevised by any after-thought, as so much of even what is justly to be called spontaneous does not. It is with aspect always and never with mean-

ing that Mr. Whistler is concerned. Nothing can be less exact than to speak of his work as affected. It would be difficult to find a better example of a pure painter, a painter to whom art is so distinct a thing in itself, and so unrelated to anything else. His attitude toward it is as simple as that of the Renaissance painters, and indeed it is method and expression that chiefly distinguish him from these. It is not rare to find a painter who admires this attitude and endeavors his utmost to assume it, whose pictures somehow look like a protest against the encroachment of literature upon the domain of painting, and a vindication of the unliterary character of pictorial art. But nothing could be further from Mr. Whistler than protests or vindications. Nothing can be more foreign to his art than set purposes; the song of a bird is not more absolutely unconscious. Anything like philosophy, anything like introspection, it does not touch; there is far less of the nineteenth century about it than of the sixteenth. And it naturally follows from this that with those subtleties of dialectics such as Couture delighted in—whether art is superior to nature, for example—he does not concern himself at all. Not a few painters, to be sure, easily shun these and devote themselves to what they reverently and unaffectedly believe to be the imitation of nature, with the result that their work is often more pleasing because of their own unconsciousness of its generalization, its selection, its modification, in a word, of its art. Mr. Winslow Homer is an excellent instance of this. And it is always dangerous for a painter consciously to attempt to meddle with the model with which nature furnishes him. But Mr. Whistler goes a step beyond this, and with ease and safety. His unconsciousness is so pure, and sophistication is so opposite to his genius, that he is somehow relieved of the necessity of imagining that he is reproducing a scene. There is nothing perilous for him in the immediate attempt to convey an impression, without referring the observer to any analogue in nature for the grounds of it. This is because —and of how many painters can the same thing be said?—this is because Whistler is not so much enamored of his material as possessed by his ideal. That is at bottom, perhaps, his distinguishing trait. "Are those figures at the top of the bridge intended for people?" asked his cross-examiner in the Ruskin trial with the familiar irony. "They are just what you like," was his reply. In other words his art is self-dependent, and is not to be referred to nature for its excuse or its justification. His "Nocturne in Blue and Silver" represents indeed Battersea bridge by moonlight, and the testimony of the humorous British court-room audience that its merits as a portrait were not prominent is not perhaps satisfactory. Whether Battersea bridge by moonlight really looked to Mr. Whistler as he represented it is of course as impossible as it is unimportant to determine. And it is the same impossibility in all cases in which nature is interpreted instead of copied that makes it impossible to settle the vexed, but, upon the whole rather idle, matter of idealization. One need not be so uncompromising a nominalist as Bishop Berkeley to believe that the beauty which the greatest artists find in nature exists only in the eye that beholds, or, better, divines it. And it is very certain that, but for the "Nocturne in Blue and Silver," the thing of which it is in any strict sense a portrait would never have been visible, whether one chooses to fancy that it exists or not. But what is important in all art of any high order is that there should be a complete harmony between its own elements. Then it may resemble Battersea bridge by moonlight, or "what you like"; there can no fault be found with it provided it be beautiful. Perhaps the least unsatisfactory definition of art that has been given is that it is "the interpenetration of an object with its ideal." It does not go so far as that of M. Taine, who, untouched by the philosophical lunacy of the pre-Raphaelites, boldly maintains that it is the representation of a character or object more completely than it is found in nature; but it has the exactness of a definition, if not the fullness of a description. And, measured by it, Mr. Whistler's pictures are in kind the perfection of art. It is his ideal always with which his work is interpenetrated; it is his ideal that interests one in his expression, and not at all his success in rendering either the superficies or the essence of natural objects. He allowed nothing to stand in the way of this. Considerations hostile to this, the neglect of which has earned him his reputation for extravagance and fantasticality, he never in the least heeds. "My whole scheme was only to bring out a certain harmony of color," he explains of the "Nocturne in Blue and Silver." "The black monogram on the frame was placed in its position so as not to put the balance of color out," he says of the "Nocturne in Black

ETCHING: "RIAULT, THE ENGRAVER."

and Gold." Of course, it is inexact to speak of this as absolutely unconscious; but, as it has been said, it is natural and spontaneous; it results from the painter's perceptions and intuitions, and there is nothing argued or logical about it. An accomplished artist knows very well wherein and how essentially he differs from the painters around him; and of course no one better than Mr. Whistler knows wherein and how vitally his art differs from that of Mr. Burne-Jones or Mr. Alma-Tadema, say. What it is here meant to indicate is only that Mr. Whistler is, perhaps, the very last person to whom one would look for any philosophical exposition of a theory of art or of painting, and that this is evident from all his pictures, spite of the superficial and seeming eccentricity of some of them. Evidently his intelligence is employed solely in expressing, not in creating, his ideal.

And the nature of his ideal is singularly pure and high. It is this which, after all, finally measures an artist—the character of his ideal, his attitude toward absolute beauty, his conception of what is best in the visible world and the world that is to be divined. What impresses Mr. Whistler most in nature, that is, in the material out of which every artist is to create his picture, is what one may call beautiful picturesqueness. What his imagination creates out of this material at any rate shows an intimate union of both character and poetry that it is rare to find. One of these two elements generally preponderates in the work of most

ETCHING: "THAMES WAREHOUSES."

"THE WHITE GIRL."

painters. The painter inclines insensibly either toward power or toward charm, or, at least, betrays an endeavor to avoid either what is vapid or what is ugly. That does not, of course, imply that a picture must be either wholly vapid or wholly ugly; but, to take extreme instances, characterlessness is the conspicuous trait of M. Bouguereau's Madonna-like peasants, and beauty is conspicuous by its absence from the pictures of M. Gèrôme. But in the work of Mr. Whistler it would be difficult to discover a specific leaning in either direction. At first thought, and seeing that his work is never without the presence of character as a distinct force, one is tempted to say of it that it is strong, or, at least, picturesque rather than beautiful. He probably sets Mr. Browning very far above Mr. Tennyson. At the same time, its character is not character simply, but always character that has a distinct charm. And this is the ideal attitude for a painter to take; to Mr. Whistler's essential attitude, at all events, it is impossible to object. No better illustration of this could be found than "The White Girl" (page 489), though, indeed, there is not an etching of Mr. Whistler's that does not more or less pointedly illustrate it. "The White Girl" is certainly a lovely picture, but its loveliness has a marked individuality. Nothing could be more delightful than the simplicity and delicacy of line and hue of this figure, nothing more graceful than her attitude, or more subtly charming than the broad harmonies worked out by the dark hair and the lily, the white drapery, and the soft fur upon which she stands. On the other hand, no one can fail to note the sense of character which pervades its loveliness, and to observe how its individuality is quite as strong as its beauty is charming. Indeed, one feels that it is an idealized portrait, quite as much as that it is ideal at all. The same is true of the portrait of the painter's brother, Mr. Joseph Whistler (page 491). There is something exceedingly sweet about this face. It might stand for an ideal representation of St. John and yet it has a distinct picturesqueness, along with its poetry. Its beauty is accentuated and its refinement strengthened by an unmistakable stamp of character. Even in this portrait one can note—indeed, cannot avoid noting—how foreign to the genius of Mr. Whistler is what one may call the saccharine quality. One does not look for any alloy of vapid or mawkish sentiment, for anything distinctly sentimental, in it, such as the main characteristic of the pictures of Bouguereau, or Merle, or Meyer von Bremen, and therefore its absence is not noteworthy. But there are other painters than the much-abused Bouguereau in whom the saccharine element prevails, and in them it is the more unpleasant, because it is refined and sophisticated out of its obviousness. "I shall never forgive Mr. Tennyson for having humbugged me when I was young," some one once remarked, with humorous exaggeration, and one may feel quite kindly toward such obvious *confiseurs* as M. Bouguereau and quite otherwise toward Mr. Burne-Jones, let us say, who is now so much the rage of æsthetic England. Mr. Burne-Jones is, it is true, a very different painter from his fellow-pre-Raphaelites, very much more of an artist than Mr. Millais or Mr. Hunt, and more of a painter than Mr. Rossetti. His work is to us quite as agreeable also as that of the English followers of the late Baron Leys, such as Mr. Alma-Tadema and Mr. Tissot. And it cannot be said that it is not as genuine and original in its mediævalism as the classicality of Mr. Leighton and Mr. Poynter; but it is distinctly saccharine. Mr. Burne-Jones's idea of absolute beauty is certainly that it is a glorified, subtly disguised languor. His dreamily poetic damsels, with their low foreheads and short upper lips, their aureoles of hair and their air of *mollesse* appeal to what is distinctly sentimental in our susceptibility; and all the cleverness of "form, color, composition, and finish" which their author bestows upon them cannot take them out of the category to which essentially M. Bouguereau himself belongs. This category is far more comprehensive than one is accustomed to think. Even Jules Dupré treads upon the verge of it occasionally, and it is a hint of something saccharine in now and then one of the mellowest of his Seine sunsets that, spite of all his decorative sweetness, marks his inferiority to Millet and Corot and Rousseau. An illustration familiar to every amateur in New York of what is here meant by the tentative epithet "saccharine" is furnished in the contrast between the superficially similar pictures of Monticelli and of Diaz. No one can avoid noting the influence which Diaz has exerted upon the Italian painter, and no one can fail to admire the loveliness and grace of the latter. But it is impossible not to see that there is something overladen—something almost more akin to feverishness than sensuousness, one may say, something justly to be called saccharine in default of a more pre-

cise term, in his riotous abandonment to the glories of color.

And all this implies an impure idea of absolute beauty, a tendency to distort rather than develop the material with which nature and his imagination furnish the painter. It is not high, it is not simple; and it does not endure; there is no trace of it in the great painters. There is none in nature, which is often unlovely enough, but never cloying to the intellect. And of all this Mr. Whistler's art is the antipodes. The portrait of his brother might, for sweetness and mildness, be of the school of Andrea del Sarto; "The White Girl" is surely one of the loveliest of figure compositions; the "Symphony in White" (page 493) is distinctively charming; an examination at all careful of the etchings here reproduced in wood-cuts reveals the definite element of beauty—beautiful lines, forms, atmospheric effects—as well as picturesqueness; and yet, in all these, one notices distinct character, definite and original individuality, and the absence of any thing like the saccharine quality. The distinctive thing about their poetry is that it is chaste. This must result from a nice poise of mind in Mr. Whistler; a just balance between an

ETCHING: "JOE."

intellect with firmness of fiber and a susceptibility with quick impressionableness. A painter concerned with ideal representation needs precisely this adjustment of interdependent faculties. If his intellect asserts itself with anything like imperiousness, he loses in beauty—as Couture, some of whose work shuns sentimentality to such good purpose as to be essentially unpoetic and almost ugly. On the other hand he loses in character, if he has a sense of this danger, and consciously subjects his intelligence to his emotion,—as Mr. Burne-Jones does possibly; or if his susceptibility imperiously asserts itself—as it does in M. Bouguereau. Mr. Whistler is a hundred times more akin to Couture than to Mr. Burne-Jones or M. Bouguereau; but what essentially distinguishes him from Couture is the greater keenness of his susceptibility—the truer balance between it and his intelligence. Unlike Couture, he is not disproportionately clever. Unlike the sentimentalists, he is not disproportionately sentimental.

The "Arrangement in Black and Gray" (page 483) emphasizes what has just been said. It is a portrait of the painter's mother, and very similar in idea and treatment to that of Mr. Carlyle, exhibited in the first Grosvenor Gallery Exhibition. The title is felicitous, and directs attention to the pictorial purpose of the portrait, which is however evident enough perhaps. How far this is removed from the portraiture one commonly meets with it is not difficult to appreciate. The difference is illustrated in a contrast furnished by the late Academy exhibition,—to select from a thousand an instance within the memory of many,—the contrast between Mr. Hicks's portrait of Mr. Parke Godwin and Mr. Eakins's of Dr. Brinton; the former of which had no pictorial quality whatever, and the latter at least a pictorial effort. Or take such an instance as Sir Frederick Leighton's portrait of Captain Burton, familiar to the readers of Mr. Hamerton's "Portfolio," and note how such portraiture, excellent and admirable as it is, utterly fails to interest any one but the acquaintance of the "sitter." Mr. Whistler, in the portrait of his mother,—as in that of Mr. Carlyle—does not seem to have had a "sitter" at all. The portraits are pictures; the pictorial quality is as prominent as the portraiture, and there is an exact equipoise between the two. In a grave dignity not without sensibility, a quiet and almost severe grace that is full of character, it is difficult to conceive of a more charming union of portraiture and picturesqueness. It should task all Mr. Ruskin's logical dexterity to believe the painter of a work so dignified and yet so poetic, capable of flinging a pot of paint in the public's face out of pure coxcombry; and yet it seems a very simple matter to see the same mind and hand in this work that are visible in the Nocturnes and Symphonies—the same delight in aspect, the same singleness of impression, the same heedlessness of environment and machinery, the same union of chaste poetry and strong character.

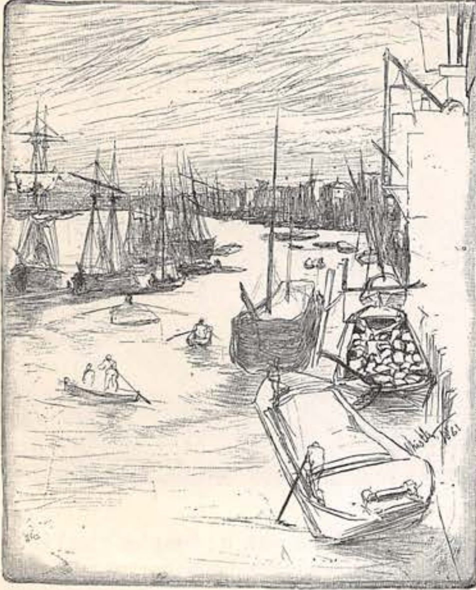
These qualities explain Mr. Whistler's undisputed excellence as an etcher. An etcher is logically an impressionist,—that is to say, as much of an impressionist as it is safe to call Mr. Whistler,—since an etching is essentially a memorandum. This is not true, of course, in a cast-iron way, but generally and largely it is true, as it is of a water-color or of anything that is chiefly dependent upon black and white values. And yet the qualities which an etching possesses besides its quality of artistic memoranda—its tone, its beauty of line and variety of light and shade, its pictorial qualities generally,—are what give it value after its distinctive quality as etching has been secured. And it is for the infallible union of these pictorial qualities with the essential quality of etching that Mr. Whistler's etchings are conspicuously admirable among the most admirable etchings, modern or old; in other words, they are always pictorial and always a memorandum of the subject. The most censorious critic of Mr. Whistler's use of pigments must be charmed with his acute sense of the limitations and possibilities of his material here. It is easy, it is tempting, and it is by no means fatuitous to proceed in etching as if these possibilities and limitations were not quite definite and plain. And it is always to be borne in mind that a beautiful thing is its own excuse, and an etching after Dupré or Corot, by Chauvel, say, is apt to be a more enjoyable plate than any of Jules Jacquemart's superb renderings of still life. But an etching by Chauvel is apt to be no more essentially an etching than its original; it is with its original that one associates and compares it and not with M. Jacquemart's. And, whereas nothing in black and white, which attempts so much the same thing, can be quite as pleasing as Dupré's landscapes, there are, perhaps, few persons who would not prefer a copy by M. Jacquemart to an original by Blaise Desgoffe. So that if there is any reason for the existence of etch-

"SYMPHONY IN WHITE, NO. III."

ing, if it is a form of expression which has its advantages, it is wise to heed its natural and necessary prescriptions. All these sit easily upon Mr. Whistler, and never seem in the least to fetter him. One can always discern in a plate of his the fitness of his subject for the especial treatment it has received,—the reason, for example, of his etching rather than painting those Thames objects which are visible from his Chelsea windows. He seems never to hesitate about the proper material expression for any of his widely various conceptions; and so when he etches, his plates have first of all the distinctive quality of etching—its quality of artistic memoranda; but they have also the pictorial qualities of his genius as prominently as his portraits or his landscapes. From his "Little Wapping," even (page 494), it is not difficult to get a clue to the traits displayed in the portrait of his mother and in "The White Girl."

If there is one rule, however, which is without exceptions, it is that one has always the defects of one's qualities. Mr. Whistler certainly has the limitations which the traits heretofore enumerated suggest. His manner and method are not commonplace; his artistic spirit is not unlike the true pagan spirit—not unlike the spirit of antique art before the Middle Age extinguished it, and of early modern art, after the monks had done with it; and his ideal is an ideal which includes both poetry and picturesqueness. But a painter of whom one's first thought is that he is not commonplace, is almost sure to seem at least tinctured with evident protestantism against conventionality; no one can utterly get rid of his environment, and be quick with the inspiration of other times and conditions; and the more comprehensive one's ideal, the greater danger there is that his art will not touch the highest point in any one direction. Mr. Whistler does sometimes seem to shun commonplace with violence. And, though nothing that Mr. Ruskin says or does is by this time surprising, it would be surprising if there were absolutely no grounds for the substantial agreement with Mr. Ruskin's criticism, in this instance, of so many persons of cultivation and refinement. A recent review of the present Grosvenor Gallery exhibition, evidently written by some one whom the mention of "impressionism" does not inflame, notes the beauty of one of Mr. Whistler's early works there displayed, in contrast to the lack of measure and propriety in the others, which are his latest. And, however far from the main point about Mr. Whistler emphasis of what are termed his technical vagaries may be, vagaries, nevertheless, are blemishes, however unimportant they are in a large estimate. It is possible,—time de-

velops tendencies so much more than it modifies them,—that this lack of *bienséance*, this impetuous rejection of everything academic, which his later work evinces, is due to a natural pugnacity—which his pamphlet be-



ETCHING: "LITTLE WAPPING."

trays—intensified, by popular misappreciation and ignorance, into an intemperate exaggeration of what was admirable originality into positive eccentricity. And positive eccentricity is always unsatisfactory. Possibly personal influences of this sort are the very last that would in any way affect Mr. Whistler's art, and it may be that the increasing vigor of his unconventionality is to be attributed to a growing impatience with the ordinary methods of expression, and an inclination to substitute suggestion for depiction. The further we can get away from pigment and from all the manifestations of pigment, the better, perhaps; and perhaps in the painter's paradise one will only need a look, or even an "energizing," with which to convey his impressions. This side of that happy country, however, one has some title to ask that a picture should be not merely an intimation or a suggestion, but a complete expression, an adequate depiction of the idea or image it contains. And in his later works—idle as Mr. Burne-Jones's and Mr. Frith's censure of their lack of "finish," lack of "form," lack of what-not, seems—Mr. Whistler does display a tendency to dispute any such title. One cannot state this without overstating it, to be sure, and it should be repeated that it does not touch the main point about Mr. Whistler. But unless a man can free himself entirely from any disposition to exaggerate his traits into peculiarities, because of stupid objections to them; and if he feels the emptiness of the commonplace around him so keenly as to betray his hatred of it in his own work, he will not wholly avoid the manifestation of qualities rather opposed to than harmonious with the simple following of an ideal.

And no one—certainly no one so sensitive and impressionable as Mr. Whistler—can utterly free himself from the influences around him, from feeling them keenly, and from resenting them indignantly, if they displease him. One may believe that the "Nocturne in Black and Gold" is more *outré* than it would have been if a protest against the conventionalities of Mr. Burne-Jones and the other advocates of "finish" had not insensibly influenced the painter's brush. And it is reasonable that his surroundings should affect him, not only in this way, but in a less positive, less obvious, and less traceable way. A painter living in Chelsea cannot get away from London and the nineteenth century entirely; and if his spirit be essentially opposed to the spirit of London and the age of steam, even to its happier manifestations, it will inevitably result that, in some way or other, his work will be limited. A "pagan kissing, for a step of Pan, the wild goat's hoof-print on the loamy down," may surely, in more ways than Mrs. Browning contemplated, "exceed our modern thinker." But it is impossible any longer to find footsteps of Pan in goats' hoof-prints, and whenever any one is now discovered kissing these, there is usually to be noticed in him a passionate vehemence, born of his consciousness that so many people around him believe the great Pan to be dead. And passion and vehemence are opposed to the truest spirit of art. Mr. Whistler does not, indeed, wear his paganism with the consciousness and the defiant air of Mr. Swinburne, for example, who is often lamenting, in one form or another, that, since the destruction of the altars of Bacchus and the images of Aphrodite by the earlier Puritans, "the world has grown gray," and that "we have fed on the fullness of death." And beside such classicism as that of Mr. Alma-Tadema, in which the daily life of ancient Rome is touched as if with a brush affixed to the traditional "ten-foot pole," and with the spirit of an amateur

archæologist rather than the sympathy of an artist, Mr. Whistler's paganism does indeed seem pure and perfect. And that Pan is not dead cannot be too often insisted upon, even in painting, for it is profoundly true. Only, the wild goat's hoof-prints are not actually his footsteps, and the more one insists that they are, the more will the hearts of the believers in the death of Pan be hardened. Spite of the infinite variety of its manifestations, the artistic spirit is everywhere, and at all times, essentially the same, it is true; but how its manifestations are warped and trammeled in some conditions, because of the inability of the artist either to neglect his surroundings or adapt himself to their stream of tendency! Mr. Whistler, admirable as his artistic spirit is, does somehow suggest these reflections. Their applicability to him may be slight; such questions are subtle, surely; but it is to be suspected that they have some real applicability to him; that the absence of any great work, any work of unmistakably large importance by him, is due to his inability to be either a child of his century or a pure pagan—to the circumstance that he is, in familiar language, more or less of a round peg in a square hole. He certainly is not Velasquez, nor does he represent what is best in the tendencies of to-day, as does our own introspective Mr. La Farge.

For with Mr. Whistler's equipment and energy, and genius, the surprising thing about him is that there should be any discussion concerning his position as a painter—that he should not have vindicated his ability by something of unmistakably large importance. And what has contributed to prevent this more, possibly, than the conflict between his genius and his century is the faultlessness of his ideal heretofore alluded to. In the very perfection of this, there is a drawback to the highest accomplishment open to genius. Of all the great painters some distinctive leaning is characteristic, generally either toward charm or toward power, though the prominence of neither implies the absence of the other. And indeed, in Mr. Whistler, one occasionally notices, spite of the distinct charm which his picturesqueness always possesses, a tendency toward picturesqueness that is rather more imperious than his sweetness; and the judgment may be hazarded that he is in so little danger from over-sweetness, that his sense of character might sometimes be even less strenuous than it is with advantage. But in the main the balance between these elements of beauty which he maintains is so just that it may have operated to prevent his accomplishment of anything absolutely great, anything of obviously large importance in the direction of either of them. One can scarcely be as admirable in all ways as Mr. Whistler is, and still touch the highest point in any one way. Delacroix, for example possessed a genius of less rounded completeness, perhaps, but at the same time, Mr. Whistler will never occupy as exalted a place in the estimation of men as Delacroix. And on the other hand, any one who turns from such a work as even the "Symphony in White," to the best work of Mr. Moore—very little known in this country, and less known anywhere than it deserves to be—must be impressed with the superior greatness of the latter. Mr. Whistler no more has the perfect grace, the subtle compromise between blitheness and melancholy, the chaste sweetness, the *spirituelle* quality, of Mr. Moore, than he has the sweep and vigor of Delacroix. But how delightful it is to reflect, that though he is not something other than he is—something which, with his traits, he could never become—nevertheless he is precisely what he is: perhaps the most typical *painter* and the most absolute artist of the time. That positive as is his delight in color, and great as is his success with it,—even according to Mr. Frith and Mr. Burne-Jones,—admirable as is his sense of form, as all his etchings show, skillful as is his composition, it is after none of these things, nor the sum of them, that he especially seeks, but after something of which they are merely the phenomena and attributes, something for which we have no other word than the Ideal.

[The editor desires to make acknowledgment of the courtesy of S. P. Avery, Esq., 86 Fifth Ave., in loaning from his large and choice collection of Mr. Whistler's paintings and etchings the originals from which the engravings in this paper have been made.]

MR. WHISTLER'S SIGNATURE.

the condenser from either tank at will. On board ship, or beside streams, the sea or river water takes the place of the larger of these tanks. The escape-pipe for the water of condensation is fitted to the bottom of the condenser, and is made as long as convenient, in order to get a fall for the water and to create a vacuum in the condenser. The operation of the apparatus is simple, and when once started it works automatically so long as the steam flows. The inlet for the cold water from the upper tank is opened and the water flows downward into the condenser, spreading over a disk inside in the form of an annular sheet, and filling the condenser about one-third full when it overflows a funnel-shaped opening below and escapes into the waste-pipe in a vortex, dragging the air after it, thus making a vacuum in proportion to the height of the fall. The steam enters the top at the same time, and meeting the cold sides of the condenser and the film of falling water is condensed and escapes as water below, assisting to maintain the vacuum. As soon as the operation is started, the upper tank of water is shut off and connection is made with the lower tank (or the sea) when the apparatus acts as a syphon, lifting its own water as fast as needed. The apparatus is reported to work well and with economy. Its use is, however, limited to places where the fall of water is sufficient to secure a good vacuum, the best results being obtained where the discharge pipe is 9.75 m. (32 ft.) long. The fact that the air-pump is dispensed with and thus the power of the engine is saved would seem to make the apparatus useful in many situations where economy of space and power must be considered.

### Some Electrical Novelties.

By a new arrangement of the parts, a common form of electro-magnet has been made into an electro-dynamometer, or apparatus for measuring the strength of electrical currents. A hollow coil or spool of wire is placed upright on a base. Just above it is hung upon a spring a core of iron, the weight of the core stretching the spring to the zero-mark on a graduated scale. This makes a spring balance or weighing apparatus, precisely as if designed to measure weights placed on the suspended core. On passing a current through the coil, the core is drawn downward into the coil, stretching the spring balance and showing the strength of the currents upon the scale. By a simple arrangement the apparatus may be made self-recording and reporting by the varying pull or attraction on the core, the varying strength of the electrical current.

A new form of receiving telephone, entitled the rotophone, and employing mechanical force. as in the motograph, though on an entirely different plan, has been brought to practical use on telephonic lines. A bar electro-magnet is passed through a coil connected with the line, resting on bearings at each end so that it may be turned (rotated) inside the coil by means of a crank on one end. A U-shaped armature rests upon the magnet, embracing the coil and touching the magnet on either side of the coil. At the bend of the armature, half-way between the ends, is secured a telephonic plate of the usual size and form and provided with the proper mouth-piece. On passing a current through the coil, the armature is attached to the magnet. Now, on turning the crank, the armature is pulled slightly out of shape (drawn inward) by the rotation of the bar combined with the magnetic attraction which tends to make it cling to and follow the movement of the magnet. On breaking the current the bar is demagnetized, the armature is released and the electricity of the plate draws the armature back, the plate resuming its normal position and the armature sliding freely (less the friction) on the rotating bar. It will be readily seen that intermittent currents, as in speech over the line, are reproduced on the plate in intermittent vibrations that reproduce on the air the sounds given to the transmitting device at the other end of the line. It will be observed that this interesting form of receiver resembles the motograph described in this department in the May number of the magazine, yet it is in principle quite unlike it. In the motograph, the vibrations are imparted to the plate from a rotating cylinder by the destruction by an electrical current of the friction between the cylinder and a spring resting upon it. In the rotophone, the armature clings to the rotating bar by magnetic attraction when the bar is magnetized, and released when it is demagnetized, the friction between the bar and armature being apparently of no consequence. Like the motograph, the rotophone is of American design, and is reported to give excellent results in practice.

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## BRIC-À-BRAC.

### Mr. Whistler's Personality.

The following facts and anecdotes concerning Mr. Whistler will be read with interest in connection with the opening paper of this number:

James A. M. Whistler was born in St. Petersburg, whither his father went in 1842 from this country, where he had had wide experience as an engineer, to superintend the works of internal improvement projected by the Russian government. He came to America, and, as his father had been, was educated at West Point. In 1855 or 1856, he went to England and soon after to Paris, where he resided for two or three years and studied with M. Gleyre. After leaving Paris he returned to England and took up his residence in London, where he has since lived. "The White Girl," sent to the Paris *Salon*, first brought him the marked attention of the public. He has continually exhibited at the Royal Academy, his first contribution being the "At the Piano." A number of his etchings were exhibited at the Hague,

unknown to himself once, and obtained him a gold medal. There is also a collection of them in the British Museum. He exhibited at the Dudley Gallery, and in 1877 sent eight pictures to the first Grosvenor Gallery Exhibition at the special invitation of Sir Coutts Lindsay, which were those that aroused Mr. Ruskin's celestial ire. "Jehu Junior," who writes of him in "Vanity Fair" as "Men of the Day—No. CLXX." says:

"Mr. Whistler—'Jimmy,' as his friends call him—is personally one of the most charming, simple, and witty of men. He touches nothing but he embellishes and enlivens it with startling novelty of conceit. His hereditary white lock of hair is a rallying point of humor wherever he goes, and his studio is the resört of all who delight in hearing the new thing."

It is evidently not difficult for the newspaper correspondent to approach him, and much has been written about his charming house and spacious studio in Chelsea. He is so thoroughly an artist that material seems indifferent to him. His famous "peacock room," which he did for Mr. Leyland, showed his genius as a decorator, and conservative opinion is fond of believing that "he is even greater as an etcher than as a painter." He has engraved, too, and painted in water-colors, of course; and his attire, from his "top-coat" to his shoe-strings, is made from his own designs. Apparently he chafes under the academic tyranny of even the tailor. And of his powers in mimicry and in character-acting his friends never tire of talking and of telling anecdotes which illustrate it and indicate that even in drollery his art is as subtle as in work of seriousness and dignity. "Dickens was not a patch on him," said some one, recently, who had seen the pantomiming of both. Anecdotes of his wit and originality abound.

"Isn't it nice," said a young lady to him at a dinner, "that such a universal artist as Mr. Leighton is the new president? He is something of an architect, you know, and his sculpture is wonderful, isn't it?"

"Yes," returned her listener, "and he paints, too."

Two painter-critics—very hostile to Mr. Whistler in their successful days, and very outspoken in their hostility—had got on the wrong side of the world, and were finally reduced to form a kind of partnership in drawing figures and landscapes on the sidewalks with colored chalks, dependent upon the pennies of admiring but uncertain passers-by. The object of their *quondam* reprobation was narrating their unhappy state to a friend. "They were doing their sidewalk pictures," said he, and added, with generous critical magnanimity, "and did them well, too."

Such a "character" must of a necessity be something of a quiz.

"Have you sat for any one lately?" he asked of a model he had just employed.

"Oh yes," she replied.

"Who?"

"Oh, Mr. Leighton, Mr. Poynter, Mr. Burne-Jones, Mr. Rossetti, ——."

"Heavens, what a lot!" broke in the painter, with charming ambiguity.

Visiting the studio of a fellow-painter, where there happened to be one of his own pictures, long before sold, his eye fell on it, and after looking at it critically for a moment, he seized a palette and brush and began to paint on it.

"How will the owner like it, do you suppose?" inquired his friend with some trepidation.

"Good gracious," was the reply, "you don't fancy a man owns a picture simply because he has bought it!"

"Do you see that bit there?" he asked one day of a visitor to his studio, indicating with a caressing gesture a spot of a canvas he had just been painting. "That sir,—that—by Jove, the man who could do that could do anything;" with a humorous twinkle, half delighted with his success, half amused at his conceit in recognizing it; which recalls to one's mind the anecdote of Thackeray writing "Vanity Fair," when after writing the sentence, "She admired her husband standing there, strong, brave, victorious," he struck his fist upon the table, as he says, and exclaimed, "By —— that's a stroke of genius!"

An arrangement for some sight-seeing or other had been made between the painter and some of his acquaintances one day, and they were to meet at his studio. When they had repaired thither, Whistler remarked it was a fine day for the expedition, and forthwith began to paint the portrait of one of the party—a lady. An hour or two went by and nothing was said of the projected object of the visit. Finally, one of the gentlemen, somewhat miffed, made some remark of dissatisfaction, and the painter, recalled to the programme arranged, expressed regret at his forgetfulness with *naif* courtesy, and made further excuses needless, by adding:

"Indeed, it's not every man in England that I'd paint a picture before."

### My Little Wife.

BY H. W. AUSTIN.

SHE isn't very pretty
  (So say her lady-friends):
She's neither wise nor witty
  With verbal odds and ends.

No fleeting freaks of Fashion
  Across her fancy run.
She's never in a passion—
  Except a tender one.

Her voice is low and cooing;
  She listens more than speaks;
While others talk of doing,
  The duty near she seeks.

It may be but to burnish
  The sideboard's scanty plate,
Or but with bread to furnish
  The beggar at the gate.

So I who see what graces
  She sheds on lowly life,
To Fashion's fairest faces
  Prefer my little wife.

And though at her with pity
  The city dames may smile,