

**WHISTLER ONCE MORE.****A Famous Painting of His, and Boldini's Portrait.**

The present season will have a place all its own in the recollections of those who are interested in Whistler. It will give us, before very long, the important exhibition of his works which has for some time been in preparation at the Metropolitan Museum, and, meanwhile, one notable incident after another has come up to provoke discussion of his art. His portrait of his brother, Dr. Whistler, has been shown at the Oehme Gallery; the painting that he made of Irving as "Philip" has lately been exhibited at the Blakeslee Gallery, and, through Mr. Macbeth, the Worcester Art Museum has acquired "The Fur Jacket." Now, at the Kraushaar Gallery, there may be seen "The Coast of Brittany," a picture dating from 1861, which is one of the most beautiful things he ever produced.

Looking at this canvas one recalls the stage in Whistler's career at which he was feeling his way toward the mode of expression best suited to his genius, making experiments and at the same time exercising a remarkable power. When he went to Paris, in the 50's, he entered the studio of Gleyre, but even while under the academic influence of that painter he made friends with Courbet and profited by his example. The extent of his indebtedness to the French realist is not easily computed. The points of contact between specific works produced by the two at this period are not by any means to be taken as indicating an imitative bent on Whistler's part. What seems most probable is that he received a broad and wholesome stimulus from Courbet, presently developing a certain simple force in his work the more naturally and happily just because he had been in the company of a vigorous and honest painter. The subtle delicacy and the decorative grace which were ultimately to distinguish him were coming to the surface. That much we may see from the famous "Piano Picture," which he painted in 1858 or 1859, and from "The Music Room," which dates from 1860. But at this time the characteristic Whistlerian "harmonies" had not got themselves conclusively invented. He had begun to devise "arrangements" of color, but, confronting a scene out of doors, he was moved to paint it with something of the robust simplicity with which Courbet had made him familiar. Thus he painted the beautiful "Thames in Ice," and, returning to France in 1861, "The Coast of Brittany" and "The Blue Wave." Place either of these pictures beside one of his later "Nocturnes" and it is plain that both were done out of the same genius, but the differences to be noted are striking.

In "The Coast of Brittany" you have the clear statement of ponderable things. The painting of the almost unbroken stretch of sand in the foreground is by itself a fine bit of realism. Then, in the rocks beyond, Whistler is equally careful to give the fact its full value, to draw it with almost painful care, and in the figure of the peasant girl introduced into the composition he shows the same solicitude for accurate representation. So, too, he paints the shining blue sea with bold fidelity to nature. In a word, he gives you here the portrait of a place. That, as everybody knows, was hardly what he sought to do when he reached his artistic prime. He transmuted nature then into a magical pattern of color. But a great painter cannot keep his essential spirit out of his work, he cannot suppress his instinct for style. Whistler's originality is writ large over this painting. It comes out in the beauty of tone and texture, it comes out above all in that indefinable quality of touch which turns clay into gold. It is doubtful if he could have painted "The Coast of Brittany" without the inspiration that he absorbed, half unconsciously, through his relations with Courbet. It is equally doubtful if Courbet could have painted "The Coast of Brittany," though, to save himself from the stake. The exquisite fineness of the color in this painting, the air of distinction it possesses, were Whistler's own. Especially does he make you feel his sense of beauty. Courbet might have treated the theme with equal truth and even, it may be admitted, with more of brusque authority. He would not have left it, as Whistler left it, an example of sheer charm. The Pennells record in their biography of him that he himself once called it "a beautiful thing." He could not have used a juster phrase.

In the life of Whistler cited above there is a reference to the portrait of him painted by Boldini in 1897, and he is quoted as bestowing these words upon it: "They say that looks like me, but I hope I don't look like that!" The truth is that it is a most veracious portrait, and whether or not it shows him, as the Pennells say, "in his very worst mood," it is a souvenir of his closing years which could not well be spared. Also it is a brilliant example of Boldini's extraordinary technical adroitness. For these reasons every one will rejoice that the painting has lately been purchased from M. Paul Hellen by Mr. A. Augustus Healy, the president of the Brooklyn Institute Museum, and by him presented to that institution. It is now on exhibition there, with the "Portrait of Miss Leyland," which the Institute possesses. The visitor who contemplates it will do well to bring with him a better knowledge of Whistler's character than is afforded by the anecdotes which have chiefly illustrated his personality for the casual reader of the present generation. He had his lovable traits. To browse amongst the reminiscences of those who were his comrades in Paris long ago is quickly to see that whilst the irre-



THE COAST OF BRITTANY.  
(From the painting by Whistler.)

pressible "Jimmie" was, even in his young manhood, a pugnacious wit, there was something wonderfully "taking" about him, and he had down to the day of his death a kind of gentle charm stowed away in his curious nature. When he chose to exert it no one could leave a friendlier impression. The present writer had the opportunity to observe him in both fantastic and simple moods. The first were not more genuine than the second. Falling into a quiet kindly strain you felt in him all that was finest and most serious in his work, all that was generous

in the man; you recognized the nature that made him, for example, a lover of children.

This, of course, is not the aspect of Whistler that Boldini caught either in the brilliant dry-point that he made of him, dozing, or in the full-length portrait. The latter shows us the Whistler of "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies," the hero of a thousand battles, the coiner of always biting and sometimes positively cruel epigrams. It was natural, and desirable, that Boldini should have commemorated Whistler the fighter rather than Whistler the dreamer.



WHISTLER.  
(From the portrait by Boldini.)

No one else could have done the thing half so well. The Italian painter wields an intense, modern and nervous brush. His sharp, clean stroke was precisely what was needed in the painting of the mask that Whistler turned to the world at large. He used it in the execution of this canvas with amazing accuracy and skill. The result is a record which, so far as it goes, is masterly, and will always be prized by those who would have every phase of the personality of a man of genius turned to the light.

The prophecies of the almanac are not, as a rule, of interest to art collectors, but "The London Morning Post" reports that "Old Man" has made a very alarming prognostication for next July. "About the end of the month," it seems, "London will be startled by the news of the daring robbery of a priceless picture. The thief will escape, and it will be many a long day before the masterpiece is brought to light. It is cold comfort to learn, on the same authority, that the weather at that time will be 'bright and warm.' Apropos of art and crime, "Morning Post" adds this pretty story:

A lady returning from the Continent was shown in her hotel a small tempera copy of the portrait of Giuliano de Medici at Bergamo ascribed to Amico di Sandro by Mr. Berenson; she had written this name on the back of the picture, of which

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