

WHISTLER.

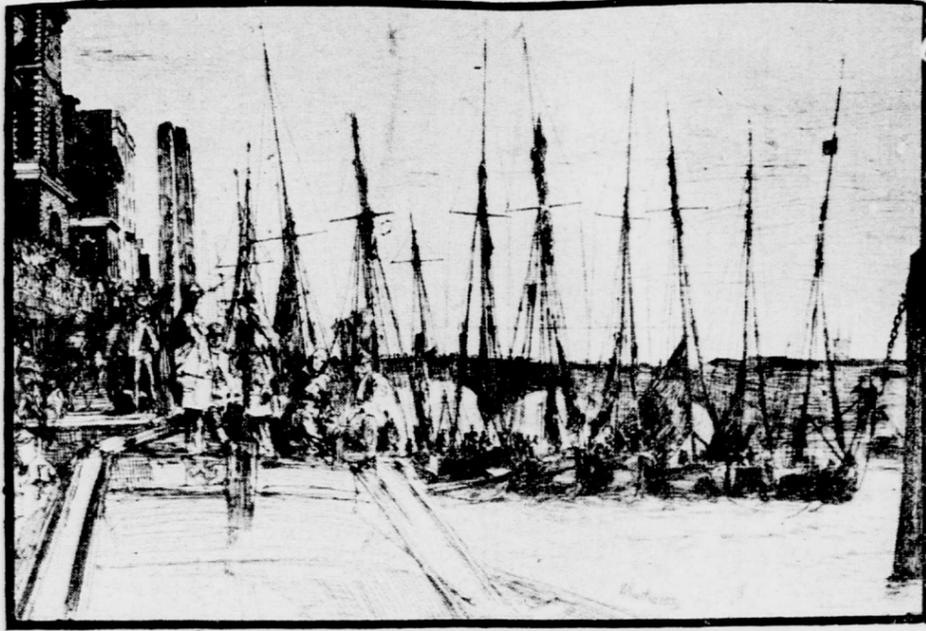
A Monument to His Genius as an Etcher.

The scientific tendency of our time, which has had so marked an influence upon the writing of history and biography, has also left its impress upon the literature of art. For many years now the critic has been also the archaeologist and the cataloguer, paying no more attention to the broad interpretation of a master's genius and to the justly proportioned statement of the facts in his life than to the identification of all of his works and the arrangement of

plains the origin of his work. The idea of dealing with Whistler as Rovinski had dealt with Rembrandt interested him for years, and he received sympathetic encouragement from the late E. B. Holden, himself a collector. To both these members of the Grolier Club it seemed an undertaking in harmony with the policy followed by that institution in the making of books, but even then, when they thought that only seven hundred reproductions at most would be required, they feared that the difficulties in the way would be unmanageable. As Mr. Kennedy remarks, if it had occurred to them that more than a thousand reproductions would be required, their zeal might, perhaps, have been permanently chilled. Nevertheless, they went

trations proposed by his previous interlocutor were to be quite small, six or eight or more of them going on a page, and he had no desire to be the hero of what he called a "commercial catalogue." He was afraid, too, that the Grolier publication might interfere with "the great work," by which he meant a project that had been mooted, having for its object the reproduction of all his works in every medium. Mr. Kennedy ultimately convinced him, as he tells in the following passage:

I explained to Whistler that the catalogue which I proposed to make, if made at all, would be for a club of 375 members, and that an edition of only 400 copies would be issued. I added that it would not be sold to the public, but only by subscription to members of the club, and that it could not interfere with "the great work" or with any other publication he might have in view. "However," I said, "wait until this evening, after dinner, and I will show you exactly what I propose to do; then if you are not pleased I shall be surprised." I borrowed Rovinski's "Rembrandt" from a friend, and as I happened at the moment to have in my possession fine impressions of "Clement de Jonghe," "Sylvius," "Lutma" and several other subjects by the Dutch master, I was enabled to show Whistler the originals and the reproductions of them side by side, and thereby give him an exact idea of what I wished to do. He had a profound admiration for the work of Rembrandt, and he was much impressed by Rovinski's catalogue. "This is quite another kind of thing," he said, "this is very swell," and went on to wonder how I should ever be able to carry out a similar undertaking. I pointed out that it would take time and patience, but that a descriptive catalogue could never be so satisfactory as one in which all the variations of his work could be seen together, and that I was resolved, with his approval, to see the thing through. He cheerfully consented, and we talked it over until it was time to go to bed. I cannot refrain from recalling here the intense interest that Whistler displayed as we examined the portraits I had brought with me. He thought the "Clement de Jonghe" was quite extraordinary and the "Sylvius" very fine. The "Burgmaster Six," on the contrary, did not move him, though he admitted that it was an unsurpassed feat of technique. He seemed to forget all about his own work in contemplating that of "the inspired Dutchman." Beneath the "Clement de Jonghe" he wrote the following tribute: "Without flaw! Beautiful as a Greek marble or a canvas by Titoret. A masterpiece in all its elements, beyond which there is nothing!"



BILLINGSGATE.

(From the first state of the etching by Whistler.)

them in a fairly chronological sequence, with indications as to where they may be found. Especially has this latter service been undertaken for the benefit of the connoisseur of prints. The names of Bartsch and Beraldi, to name only two in a long list, are held in high honor by the collector. Without the pages of these and other authorities he would often be, indeed, in sad case, painfully picking his way through an almost intolerable confusion as to dates, "states," and so on. Many an historian of Rembrandt has been helpful to the collector of the great Dutchman's etchings, but it was left to Rovinski to prepare the definitive illustrated catalogue which would illuminate practically every nook and cranny of the subject. If the print collector, looking over that book at the time of its publication twenty years ago, had been asked what companion it needed, he could have made only one answer, demanding a similar work on Whistler. Such a work has now been printed.

It is the latest of these publications brought out in luxurious form and in limited editions which bear the imprint of the Grolier Club, and forms a precious monument to the genius of a great American artist. It consists, in the first place, of a convenient quarto, beautifully printed at the De Vinne Press, and having for its title "The Etched Work of Whistler; Illustrated by Reproductions in Collotype of the Different States of the Plates; Compiled, Arranged and Described by Edward G. Kennedy. With an Introduction by Royal Cortissoz." This, however, forms only part of the scheme. It is accompanied by three portfolios which contain more than a thousand facsimiles. In other words, we have here in some sort a unique collection of Whistler's etchings, a gallery to which the collector may turn for absolutely conclusive information as to practically every touch of the artist's needle. The authorship of the brief introduction surely need not be permitted to interfere with some description in this place of a work long awaited by students of Whistler as promising an aid to the pursuit of their hobby available in no other way.

The desirability of a list of Whistler's etchings was recognized as far back as 1874, when Mr. Ralph Thomas prepared a catalogue of the eighty-five subjects then known to him. The next writer to take up the subject was Mr. Frederick Wedmore, who published a catalogue of 214 plates in 1886. Thirteen years later he issued a second edition, including 54 additional subjects, and after three years Mr. Kennedy still further extended this record, enumerating nearly a hundred subjects not previously catalogued. The exhibition at the Grolier Club in 1904 afforded an opportunity to put thirty-four more subjects in the list, and there, for a time, the matter rested. In 1909 it was brought to notice again through the publication by the Caxton Club in Chicago of a catalogue by Mr. Howard Mansfield, enumerating 440 plates, treating five additional pieces in an appendix, and thus exceeding the labors of all previous compilers. Every one of these Whistlerian devotees is gratefully recognized by the collector, but they necessarily yield to Mr. Kennedy, whose text, disclosing in itself exhaustive knowledge, is rendered doubly valuable by the facsimiles accompanying it.

In the course of his prefatory notes he ex-

on, with the final result that the Grolier Club has carried to completion a seemingly impossible task. Mr. Kennedy has some interesting things to say about his development of the scheme with Whistler. When he first broached the subject, in 1901, the artist offered objections, saying that some one had made a similar proposition to him, which he had instantly brushed away. Discussion revealed the fact that he had got the impression that the illus-

Mr. Kennedy alludes to the many journeys made in the interest of this catalogue, and his examination of countless impressions in public and private collections. Clearly all this has been a labor of love. He is singularly unobtrusive and concise in his text, confining himself to the tersest description where such light is needed, and altogether framing his list and notes in such wise as to give the collector the simplest, clearest and most practical help. Of course, in many instances, comment is the briefer since the facsimiles are there. The usefulness of these it would be impossible to exaggerate. They serve a double purpose. In the first place, they facilitate the clearing up of the collector's problems, especially as regards the chronology of "states." Furthermore, for the student generally, they vividly expose the evolution of the



FINETTE.

(From the ninth state of the etching by Whistler.)



FLEUR DE LYS PASSAGE.

(From the third state of the etching by Whistler.)

etcher's style, as well as something of the secret of his method. Whistler was a craftsman of extraordinary authority, but he was hard to satisfy, and, by the very nature of the process he employed, he was repeatedly urged to work over a given plate, not infrequently carrying it through eight or nine "states" before he felt that he had achieved precisely what he was driving at. Eleven times he thus studied "The Balcony," one of his later Venetian plates. The incident is characteristic of his solicitude for perfection. To pore over these facsimiles is to be admitted into his workshop and to gain a new sense of the capacity of genius for taking pains. A word as to the character of the reproductions. Made by the photo-gelatine process and of the exact dimensions of the originals, they are wonderfully satisfactory substitutes for the latter. R. C.

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