

DEGAS, PAINTER OF THE BALLET AND HORSE RACES

Master Delineator of Certain Phases of Paris Life, He Is Latter Day Ingres Who Has Studied Japanese

Two illustrations to be found on this page to-day are fairly characteristic of the French genius who has his life long devoted himself to portraying ballet girls, horse races and the humblest toilers of Parisian life. You think of the Japanese Hokusai, the "old man mad with paint," when the name of Degas is mentioned. He was born at Paris, July 19, 1834 (therefore he has just achieved his seventy-eighth birthday). His full name is Hilaire Germain Edgar (or Edgar), and there is one phrase that will best describe his career: He paints, like Flaubert, he never married, but lived in companionship with his art. Such a man could have been described by Balzac, yet no painter ever seemed from a Parisian atelier—same, same and beautiful.

Degas is a painter's painter. For him the subject is a peg upon which to hang superb workmanship. In amaze some critics asked: How could a man in the full possession of his intellectual and artistic powers shut himself up in a studio to paint ballet dancers, washerwomen, jockeys, Montmartre drabs, shop girls and horses? Even Zola, who should have known better, would not admit that Degas was an artist; fit to be compared with such men as Flaubert and Gœtze; but then Zola was never the realist that Degas is.

Nowadays it is difficult to keep asunder the names of Gœtze and Degas, to us they are too often and modestly bracketed. The style of the painter has been judged analogous to that of the novelist. Yet apart from a preference for the same subjects, for the "modernity" of Paris, there is not much in Degas that recalls Gœtze's staccato, foible, sparkling, "decomposed" impressionistic prose. Both men are brilliant, but not in the same way. Pyrotechnics are abhorrent to Degas. He has much of the serenity, sobriety and impersonality of the great classic painters. He is himself a classic.

His legend is slender. Possessing an income, he was never preoccupied with the anxiety of selling his pictures. He first entered the atelier of Lamotte, but his stay there was brief. George Moore declares that he was the student in the atelier of Ingres who carried on the lifeless body of the painter when he fell in his fatal fit. There is aptness if not altogether truth in this anecdote, for the tradition of Ingres has in a measure been carried on by Degas.

The greatest master of pure line in his portraits and nudes of the last century, Ingres has been and still is a god on the peaks of Parnassus for Degas. He is a latter day Ingres who has studied the Japanese. Only such men as Polignone and Botticelli outrank Degas in the mastery of rhythmic line. He is not academic, yet he stems from purest academic tradition. He is not of the impressionists, not at least in his technical processes, but he associated with them, occasionally exhibited with them and is as a rule uncritically confused with them. He never exhibited in the salons and he has no disciples, yet it is doubtful if any painter's manner of seeing things has had such an influence on the generation following him. The name of Degas, the pastels of Degas, the almost miraculous draughtsmanship of Degas, created an imponderable fluid which still permeates artistic Paris. Naturally after

the egg trick was discovered we encounter scores of young Columbuses who paint the legs of ballet girls, the heads of musicians in the orchestra and scenes of the racing paddock.

There are, however, three painters who might truthfully call themselves pupils of Degas; they are Mary Cassatt, Alexis Rouart and Forain. The last named has achieved solid fame; the last is a remarkable illustrator who "vulgarized" the austere method of his master for Parisian consumption. That Rouart, Raffaelli and Toulouse-Lautrec owe much to Degas is the secret of Polchinnello. This patient student of the Tuscan primitives, of Holbein, Chardin, Delacroix, Ingres and Manet, the precepts of Manet taught him to sweeten the witness of his modelling and modify his tendency to a certain harshness; was willing to trust to time for the verdict upon his rare art.

He daily associated with Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Whistler, Fantin-Latour, Duranty, the critic, and the crowd that went to the Café Guerbois up in the Bati-gnolles quarter; later to the Nouvelles Athenes, finally to the Café de la Rochefoucauld. Hermit as was Degas during the dozen hours a day he toiled, he was also a sociable man, a cultured man, fond of music and the owner of a tongue that was feared as much as the Russian knout. Mr. Moore has printed specimens of his truly caustic wit. Whistler actually kept silence in his presence, possibly expecting a reprimand of the sort: "My dear friend, you conduct yourself in life just as if you had no talent at all."

Manet took a brookwatering good naturedly, but the academic set was outraged by the irreverence of Degas. What hard sayings were! Poor Bastien-Lepage too came in for a scolding. Once barricaded in his studio, it was a brave man who attempted to force an entrance. The little, round shouldered artist, usually good natured, would then pour a stream of verbal vitriol over the head of the unlucky impertinent.

In 1860 or thereabout he visited America and in New Orleans he saw the subject of his "Interior of a Cotton Factory," which was shown as a historical curiosity at the Paris exposition in 1889. But though it is realistic there is little hint of the future Degas. The name of the painter was on every French artist's lips, and the brilliant article of Huysmans consecrated his fame, for Huysmans it was who first saw that Degas had treated the nude as Rembrandt would have done if he had been alive, of course making allowances for temperamental variations.

Degas knew that to grasp the true meaning of the nude it must be represented in postures and movements which are natural, not mere studio attitudes. As Monet exposed the fallacy of studio lighting, so Degas revealed the inanity of its poses. Rosen has said that the stage should be a room with the fourth wall removed, the wall which is faced by the spectators. Degas preferred the key-hole through which we seem to peep upon the privacy of his ugly women bathing, or combing their hair, or sleeping, lounging, yawning, walking. The sunken and frog-like postures and sprawling attitudes are far from arousing amiable sensations. These poor, tired women, hard working



A BALLET REHEARSAL, AFTER DEGAS.

laundresses and shop girls, are not alluring, though they are not as hideous as the women of Cozanne or Edward Munch; but the veracity of the "human document" is not missing.

Charles Morice has told us that Cozanne a potato was as significant as a human countenance; the artist in both interested him. For Degas the beauty of life lies in the moving line. He captures with ease the swift, unconscious gestures. His models are never posed. They are nature caught in the act. Now there is said to be a difference between the epidermis of the professional model and the skin of a human being who undresses only to bathe or go to bed. Degas has recorded this difference. What an arraignment of the corset are the creased backs and gooseflesh of his models! The majesty of which were not professional. What a lurking cynicism there is to be seen in some of his interiors! "Voilà l'animale!" he exclaims as he shows the far from enchanting antics of his female studios.

How Schopenhauer would have laughed at the truths of Degas! Without the leer of Rops, nevertheless, Degas is thrice as unpleasant. But he is a salutary douche for the romantic humbug painter, por-

trayer of sleek drawing room bayaderes.

He is never tender, yet there is a veiled sympathy in the ballet girl series. Looking at them we believe pity is rooted in his nature. Behind the scenes, in the waiting rooms, at rehearsals, going home with hawk eyed mothers, his dancing girls are painfully real. No "glamor of the footlights" here, but generally the prosaic side of their life. He has, however, painted the glorification of the danseuse, of that lady grandiloquently entitled prima donna assoluta. What magic he evokes as he pictures her floating down stage!

"L'Etrole" the pastels in the Luxembourg, is the reincarnation of the precise moment when the aerial creature on one foot lifts graceful arms and is transfigured in the glow of the lights, while about her beats, you are sure, the insistent noisy music. It is the definite reconstruction of such scenes in the pinning down of such a climax of mobility that Degas stirs our admiration. He draws movement. He depicts rhythms. His canvases are ever in modulation. His sense of tactile is profound. His is true esthetic aphoric color.

A feeling of exhilaration is induced while contemplating one of his open air scenes with its jockeys, trainers, race-horses, betting ring, touts and the incidental bustle of a neighboring concourse. Unexcelled as a painter of horses, as a delineator of winking horsemanship, of vivid landscapes—true decorations—and of the casual movements and gestures of everyday folk, Degas is also a psychologist, an ironical commentator on the prettiness and ugliness of daily life, of its unheroic aspects, its comical snobberies and shocking hypocrisies, and all expressed without melodramatic elevation, without the pseudo-sentimentalism of Zola or the morbidity of Toulouse-Lautrec. There is much Baudelaire in Degas, as there is in Rodin. All three men despised academic rhetoric; all three dealt with new material in a novel manner.

It is become the fashion to admire Degas, but it is doubtful if he will ever gain the suffrage of the general. He does not retail anecdotes, though to the imaginative every line of his nudes relates their history. His irony is unerring. It suffuses the ballet girl series and the nude sets. Irony is an illuminating mode, though it is seldom pleasing; the public is always suspicious of an ironist, particularly of the Degas sort. Careless of reputation, laughing at the vanity of his contemporaries who were eager to arrive, contemptuous of critics and criticism of collectors who buy low to sell high, Degas has defied the world of art for three score years. His genius compelled the mountain to come to Mahomet.

The rhythmic articulations, volume, contours and bounding supple line are the despair of artists. Like the Japanese, he indulges in abridgments, deformations, falsifications. His enormous faculty of attention has counted heavily in his syncretical canvases. He joys in the representation of artificial light;

his theatres are flooded with it and he is equally successful in creating the illusion of cold, cheerless daylight in a saloon where rehearse the little ballet "rats" and the coryphées on their wiry, muscular, ugly legs.

His vast production is dominated by his nervous, resilient, vital line and by his supremacy in the handling of values. The Degas palette is never gorgeous, consisting as it does of cool grays, discreet blues and greens, Chardin-like whites and Manet blacks. His procedure is all his own. His second manner is a combination of drawing, painting and pastel. "He has invented a kind of engraving mixed with wash drawing, pastel crayon crushed with brushes of special pattern," says Mauclair.

Let us suppose that gray old misogynist Arthur Schopenhauer persuaded to cross the Styx for a short earthly visit. Apart from his disgust if forced to listen to the music of his self-elected disciple, Richard Wagner, what painter would be likely to attract him most? Remember that he it was who named woman the knock-kneed sex. Wouldn't the nudes of Degas confirm the Frankfurt philosopher in his theories concerning the "long haired, short on brains, unesthetic sense," and also confirm his hatred for the exaggerations of post and painter when describing or depicting her? We fear that Schopenhauer would smile his malicious smile and exclaim: "At last the humble truth! It is the presentation of the humble truth that early snared the affections of Degas, who has with passionate calm pursued the evanescent appearances of things his entire life. No doubt death will find him pencil in hand. At the present writing he is in poor health and quite feeble."

Mr. Moore relates that one day while at the studio of Degas his eye was caught by a faint drawing in red chalk placed upon a sideboard. He went straight to it. Degas said: "Ah, look at it. I bought it only a few days ago. It is a drawing of a female hand by Ingres. Looking at those fingernails. See how they are indicated. That's my idea of genius. As a man who finds a hand so lovely, so wonderful, so difficult to render that he will shut himself up all his life, content to do nothing else but indicate fingernails."

And this was Degas himself, with a larger canvas of life. To those who want to write about him he says: "Leave me alone. You didn't come here to count how many shirts I have in my wardrobe." "No, but your art; I want to write about it." "My art? What do you want to say about it? Do you think you can explain the merit of a picture to those who have not seen it? Say? I can find the best and clearest words to explain my meaning and I have spoken to the most intelligent people about art and they have not understood; but among people who understand words are not necessary. You say, humph, ha, ha, and everything has been said. My opinion has always been the same. I think that literature has only done harm to art. You puff the artist;

The Movement Transferred to His Pictures the Despair of Other Artists—His Sharp Wit

with vanity, you inoculate the taste for notoriety, and that is all; you do not advance public taste one jot. Notwithstanding all your scribbling it is never in a worse state than it is at present. Speak out? You do not even help us to sell our pictures. A man buys a picture not because he read an article in a newspaper, but because a friend who he thinks knows something about pictures told him it would be worth twice as much ten years hence as it is to-day. Say!"

Of Manet he said to a friend: "Do you remember how he used to turn on me when I wouldn't send my pictures to the Salon? He would say: 'You, Degas, you are above the level of the sea, but for my part when I get into an omnibus and some one doesn't say "Mr. Manet, how are you? Where are you going?" I am disappointed, for I know then I am not famous.'"

Whistler's personal vanity was well known to Degas, who said of him: "You cannot talk to him; he throws his cloak around him and goes off to the photographer." He called Bastien-Lepage the Bouguereau of the modern movement, and of Roll's picture, entitled "Word," he said: "There are fifty figures, but I see no crowd; you can make a crowd with five, not fifty."

At a dinner at Bougiral he said, looking at some large trees massed in shadow, "How beautiful they would be if Corot had painted them." And speaking of Besnard's effort to attain lightness of treatment he said: "He is a man who tries to dance with leaden soles." If led to speak on the marvellous personality of his art Degas will say: "It is strange, for I assure you no art is less spontaneous than mine. What I do is the result of reflection and study of the great masters: of inspiration, spontaneity, temperament—temperament is the word—I know nothing. When people talk about temperament it always seems to me like the strong man in the fair who straddles his legs and asks some one to step up on the palm of his hand."

Again, in reply to an assurance that he of all men now working, whether with pen and pencil, is surest of the future,

yet it was uttered before Nietzsche was in print. Mr. MacColl has pointed out that Ingres the modern ballet was an abomination, and in speaking of the passion for form to be noted in Degas he adds, "It is not the grand passion of the family of Delacroix, still less the composure of Ingres; he requires, if not drama, action, and observes it, not moved by its motive, but fascinated by its extravagance." The same astute critic notes the Japanese influence in the development of Degas. It was a stimulus, a new base for his view of the prodigious toys of sight, and it came from the art revealed to Europe in the '60s, that of the Japanese prints.

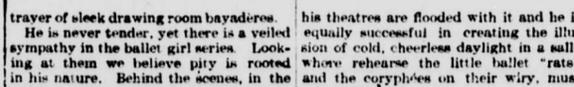
Here, over against the classic tradition of pictures in which only noble forms were admitted under an exalted sentiment, was an art in which the entertainment of the eye was more lightly taken and elastically served. Man was thrown back into the company of a world of odd creatures, all of them exquisitely amusing, and Japanese man might seem to the European classic eye himself an odd and irregular animal. Frogs, fishes and birds were thrown upon the page with a gay delight in the character of each. When man appeared the tricks of his extravagant action and grimace were pursued with the same zest. Space itself seemed to be taken more lightly, cut at any angle, with a more movable horizon.

In this art, as variable in its level, mood and subject as speech, sensation and fancy were stamped clear and sharp in an adaptable language, without any of the obligations of "making good" between the lively points. If spring was meant spring was said with an unmistakable flush of blossom like an exclamation; if night was meant night was said as simply; if a distance was not desired a cloud shut it out; if the spectator was to know that an opium smoker felt his head floating far above his supine body and its clothes, it was so depicted. The composition was as flexible as the state of mind; central point of interest, pyramid of form, equal symmetry, gave away to an elastic balance in an ideal system of mass, distance and centre of pictorial gravity.

With those all their liberation, the dainty or fierce amusement of the eye, their unexpected cutting of space, and their reserve, precocious for a draughtsman, of a line contour along with tone, Degas attacked his subjects. One of the safeguards of Ingres against the modern subject had been his indifference to color; this left him untouched by the landscape interest of his time and the subtle plea for realism that the landscape study of atmosphere transferred to the whole of art.

Degas had this further bond to the actual, that he was sensitive to atmospheric color. But this, like his form, to please him must be strange reality. He found it strangest and most piquant in the lights and air of the theatre. Pastel gave him his most characteristic instrument, for with that he could assert his outline and vary the excitement of color, from vaporous stamping to the shock and vibration of hatched, unblended strokes.

Mr. MacColl tells us it has been suggested that Degas may have taken the idea of racecourse subjects from Frith's "Derby Day." Whether this be so or not, the picture offers a capital example of what the "same subject" becomes to different minds. Frith, with all his remarkable ingenuity and skill, spreads over everything an emollient of prettiness, flattering the laziness of the general eye. Degas applies a sharp developer, stamping horse and jockey as strange beings we have not seen before, but will often see after.



AT THE RACE COURSE, AFTER DEGAS.

he said: "It is very difficult to be great as the old masters were great. In the great ages you were great or you did not exist at all, but in these days everything conspires to support the feeble." This last idea has a decided ring of Nietzsche.

GLACIERS QUARRIED FOR ICE

Quarrying glaciers is becoming an important industry in Switzerland, and wherever a glacier in the Alpine districts can be connected by chutes with some place having good transportation facilities companies have been or are being formed to carry on the business, concessions having been granted by many Swiss communes. The French city of Lyon is the most important consumer of this glacier ice, which owing to its purity and transparency commands a higher price than that cut from lakes or rivers.

The ice is blasted out of the glaciers by means of black powder, which it has been found does not discolor the ice as giant powder does. The blocks have to be stored for some time in icehouses such as are used in this country, made of two walls of lumber, with sawdust filling the space between them, in order that a coating of frosted or non-transparent ice which covers the blocks after they have been removed from the glacier may be removed.

Much ingenuity is shown in building the chutes which carry the blocks of ice down the mountain sides. In order to reduce the great velocity they would acquire were the chutes perfectly straight curves are introduced here and there to impede it.

But even more remarkable is it that ice should be quarried on the sides of the famous Sicilian volcano Mount Etna. Were the Sicilians a little more energetic no doubt Messina would have been supplied before the earthquake razed it with all the ice it needed by a "Mount Etna Ice Quarrying Company" and beautiful Taormina would not have to rely on Sweden and Norway for its supply.

As it is the industry is carried on in a desultory manner. Etna is 10,840 feet high and during the winter is snow capped. Whenever an eruption occurs the fragments of rock and ashes thrown out of the crater spread over the snow, which is compressed by the weight and so forms ice. Just as the sawdust used in icehouses protects the ice, so does the dust from the volcano form a non-conductor of heat for the compressed snow on Mount Etna.

These deposits of ice have been forming for untold centuries and now and then they are exposed through an earthquake or the sliding down of a mass of volcanic matter. On these occasions if the labor is not too great the lazy Sicilian will pick out a few blocks of ice and sell them to Catania or Taormina.

CHIMNEY SMOKE A SYMBOL

"Can anybody tell me," said Mr. Dreamington, "why I like the sight of smoke?" "Not far from where I live there's a tall stack of a factory of some sort. I love to sit and watch the smoke rising from that tall chimney, rolling sometimes straight up, or blowing this way or blowing that. This smoke plume is our weather-vane. But smoke has many significances. "See the smoke flying fiercely back from the stacks of an ocean steamer—sign of tremendous energy and conquering power. "See in some peaceful countryside in the still air of early morning smoke curling upward from the stout chimney of the farmer's home, betokening a stirring within and breakfast soon. "See the smoke that rises from the campers fire—freedom, and good cheer. "See the smoke of burning incense in the churches—devotion. "The smoke of the myriad chimneys of the town, activity, endeavor, pushing enterprise and the rich and the poor. "Smoke is the universal outward sign of man; the world around it signifies everything that human life, savage or civilized, implies. This, no doubt, is the reason why I like the sight of smoke; but I should be glad if somebody could make it plainer for me, for my better, keener understanding."



The Little Princess of Broganza.