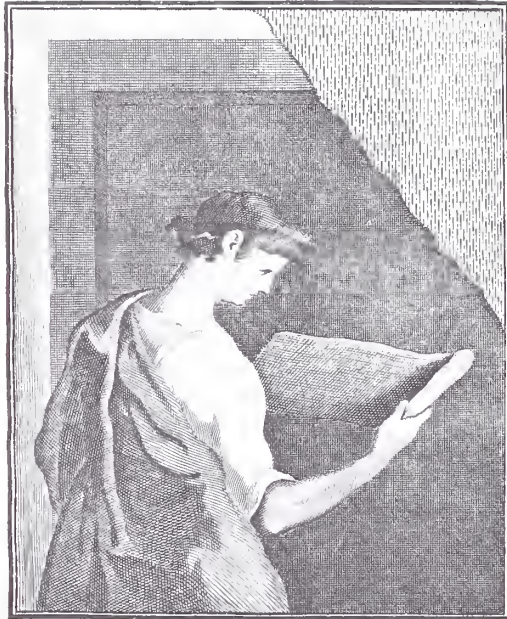


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MASTERS IN ART

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STEVENS
CONSOLATION
OWNED BY M. L. RAVENA





Alfred Stevens

BORN 1828: DIED 1900
BELGIAN SCHOOL

IT should be clearly understood that two Alfred Stevenses appear in the history of art. One was an Englishman who became the strongest English sculptor of his day. Some of his works — the statues for the Wellington Memorial, for example, or the decorations of Dorchester House — are extremely fine. This Stevens was also an admirable draftsman, and he painted some portrait heads which are very remarkable. The other Alfred Stevens is the subject of this sketch.

Alfred Stevens, or, to give his full name, Alfred Émile Leopold Joseph Victor Ghislain Stevens, was born in Brussels on May 11, 1828. His father, Leopold Stevens, had served in the army. He was at Waterloo on the staff of the Prince of Orange. It may be that Alfred inherited from his father that military *allure*, that air of *un beau sabreur* that distinguished him in after-life. Indeed, he was accounted one of the handsome men of the Second Empire. His elder brother, Joseph, also became an artist, and painted animals with marked ability; and the younger brother, Arthur, became a dealer in art, who was one of the first to recognize the ability of Millet, of Rousseau, and of Corot.

The young Stevens may have inherited some of his artistry from his father, who had a passion for pictures and collected many. His son, then, did not have the early struggle of many young artists. His father encouraged his talent, and at an early age he was put to work in the studio of Navez, in Brussels. This Navez was an honest painter, without genius, but one who had the intelligence to say to his pupils, "Look at Nature. She will teach you everything you need to know in the beginning."

Nothing but drawing was done in this atelier. Stevens, a born colorist, longed to paint. One day he was surprised, palette and brushes in his hand, by his master. The old man looked long at his study, then said, "Put on your cap, young man. We will go and talk this matter over with your grandfather." Alfred obeyed, trembling, and after a long walk was brought into the presence of his grandfather, Monsieur Dufoy. "Dufoy," said Navez, "you see before you a great painter." So at least the story runs.

Camille Roqueplan, a well-known painter of the time, was often in Brus-

sels. Monsieur Dufoy showed some of Alfred's studies to him and the painter offered to take the youth to Paris. After a short time he was admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts where, among other teachers, the great Monsieur Ingres sometimes corrected his work. However, Stevens returned to Brussels after a year or two of study in Paris.

His first picture was called 'The Wounded Soldier.' It now hangs in the Museum of Hamburg. He also painted a 'Young Man drawing an Anatomy Figure.' Both these early pictures show the fine quality of a painter. Roqueplan, who was again in Brussels, saw these canvases. "Come back to Paris with me," he said, "your place is with the masters."

Young Stevens returned to Paris and worked in the studio of a friend, Florent Willems, who painted pictures which enthusiasts compared to Terborch. While of course this was much too high praise, Willems knew well the fine art of the old Flemings and Hollanders, and taught it to Stevens. Stevens's earliest pictures at this stage were, indeed, mistaken for Willems's, but the young man soon surpassed the elder. One of these paintings was a 'Young Girl Reading,' which is quite beautiful in quality.

Our artist painted various other pictures at about this time, but his first great success was a canvas quite different from his later work called 'Les Chasseurs de Vincennes,' or 'Ce qu'on appelle Vagabondage.' This represented soldiers taking some "unfortunates" to the police station. Apart from the fact that it was well painted, it created some little stir on account of the subject. Napoleon III. stopped before the picture at the Salon and, remarking that such a duty was unworthy of soldiers, gave orders that they should not be employed in that way again. Stevens afterwards said that he had never thought of any political or sociological intention while painting his picture, yet the canvas achieved a result that more ambitious problem pictures often fail in producing.

His next important picture was one called 'Consolation' (Plate VIII). It represented a weeping woman with two other women trying to console her. The picture made a certain stir in the Salon and a dealer, pretending to think it a rather poor painting, offered Stevens fifteen hundred francs (\$300) for the painting. The artist refused, and later had the satisfaction of selling the picture for six thousand francs. This picture marks the real beginning of Stevens's successful career. Shortly after this, being now on the top wave of prosperity, Stevens married and took a fine studio.

For Stevens the strong wave of prosperity had now set in, and for many years he had only to paint a picture to get a good sum. It is to his credit that he still continued to make his paintings with the utmost care and conscience, despite the temptation to produce clever, scamped work, which the dealers would have eagerly bought. His work grew more and more popular, so that it became a question of whether or no he should be given the Medal of Honor. But certain persons of importance felt that mere *genre* painting should not be accorded the honors paid to historical painting. Also it was felt that his pictures dealt too exclusively with women. Robert Fleury, who was then a dictator in matters of art, said to him, "Promise me to change

your kind of subject and we will give you the Medal of Honor." "Keep your medal," said Stevens, "for me, I'll keep my way of painting."

Stevens painted very carefully and minutely, but fast, as well; and from something he says himself one may guess he sometimes turned out as many as thirty pictures a year. Money poured in, and he spent it royally in rich stuffs and Japanese screens and vases and bronzes. For he was one of the first to appreciate Japanese art in its curious revival in the "sixties." Japanese art had a great vogue in France in Louis xv.'s time. But then, they were curios that were most affected, idols, pagodas, and "stuffs printed with flowers." Later this interest in *Japoniseries* suffered an eclipse.

But in the beginning of the sixties Paris came again under the influence of this delightful Japanese art. Somebody, Braquemond the engraver, it is said, discovered a lot of prints from Hokusai, used, so the story goes, for wrapping-paper. He showed these to other artists. A veritable rage for Japanese prints developed. Diaz, Fortuny, James Tissot, Alphonse Legros, Manet, Whistler, Fantin-Latour, Degas, Monet, were some of the original admirers of Japanese art. Millet and Rousseau, so it is said, quarreled about who should have prints by Hokusai. And of these enthusiasts Alfred Stevens was not the least.

His imperturbable Flemish good sense kept him, however, from imitating Japanese work in his paintings. He was content to make his interiors richer and more bizarre, with Japanese screens and stuffs and bronzes, but he kept to the good solid fat Flemish tradition of painting,—a tradition lost for a long time, but which Baron Leys rediscovered, as it were, in studying the work of the Van Eycks. One says this, and yet it may be that a certain thinness and dryness which later crept into Stevens's work was not wholly the result of old age, but partly of this Japanese art. For Japanese art, with all its charm, can have a bad effect as well as good.

At the gay court of Napoleon III. Stevens was always a favorite. Both at the Tuileries and at the country parties in Compiègne, where there were very lively doings, he was *persona grata*. Perhaps it was more as *un galant homme*, and a witty one as well, rather than as an artist that he was welcomed; still his painting, brilliant yet discreet, was very much admired by the charming frail creatures of the court whom he knew so well how to paint.

"A lightsome eye, a soldier's mien"—these things Stevens brought with him, and more: he brought the reputation of a great artist. There have been artists, like Millet and Courbet, who could not have lived in such surroundings. But with Stevens it apparently had no bad effect, for surely no painting could be more *soigné* and conscientious than was his at that time.

The wonderful gay world of the Second Empire deserves a word in passing. Founded in corruption, with an emperor whose very birth was suspicious, with an empress who, though beautiful, was, to say the least, indiscreet and foolish, this period still had its own charm—the charm of *sans gêne*, of *diablerie*, of joyousness. Paris was never gayer than in this time of the Second Empire. One thinks, in reading of it, of that false court to which came the Knight Geraint and his Lady Enid, where all the men were boors and all the women

wanton. And yet a certain elegance went with this corruption. It was the time of crinolines, of crime, and of crimson joys.

But it was not only in court circles that he was famous and popular, but in the quasi-literary society as well, especially in that presided over by charming and well-born blue-stockings like the Princesse Mathilde. There he met men like Dumas *fils* , Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Edmond About. And though the art of these men lay in words, Stevens was famous among them all for his brilliant wit as well as for a certain *bon sens Flamand* , which never deserted him.

Never were the boulevards gayer or more brilliant than in those days. Old men who know their Paris will tell you sadly that the city has never been so lively since the Franco-Prussian War. And of these brilliant *boulevardiers* Alfred Stevens was not the least. His dashing air of a cavalryman, his handsome face, and his brilliant wit made him a favorite wherever he went. He was always welcome at the magic *heure de l'Absinthe* in this or that famous café. He was an *habitué* of the theatres and the popular restaurants. In short, he was part of *tout Paris* , and for years he was able to live the brilliant life of a *boulevardier* and yet to paint as well as ever each morning on his wonderful little masterpieces.

The Franco-Prussian broke rudely into these happy times. Stevens, like the son of a brave soldier, offered his services to the Government of Paris during the siege. And when one thinks of the Frenchman Monticelli running away to Marseilles to escape the siege, while the outlander Stevens offered his life to the city which had welcomed him, it appears that there may after all be some connection between honesty in art and honor in the conduct of life. This, with the resultant change in the government of France from an empire to a republic, was for Stevens the beginning of the end. Never after this did he win quite the same success. Never, indeed, did he again paint so well. The change was very slow, very gradual. It was twenty years in the making, yet to the student of his life it is evident the war marked the moment. Before, his art was always growing and improving; afterwards, it began its slow beautiful decay. For years the immensely brilliant technique continues, but something of the beautiful simplicity which made his early work not unworthy to be mentioned in the same breath with Vermeer or Terborch, something of this rich, full, simple *facture* is gone.

After the war the painter's life began again; but somehow it was never quite the same. Besides, he was getting older. He had some sort of malady, it is said, induced by paint poisoning, and his doctor recommended him to be out of doors a great deal of the time. It is from this period that his marine paintings date. Some of them are quite charming. But it may be said that Stevens was not a born landscape or sea painter. At all events, his outdoor work does not impress one as being so true or so closely studied as his early indoor work. Perhaps it was that he was getting older, for his indoor work as well, at this time, grows thinner and sleazier — it lacks *la belle pâte* of the earlier days. And it is not so well drawn. There is always distinction, but not the same breath of life.

In 1880 the city of Paris put a street through the house where Stevens had been living and he was obliged to move. He took a sumptuous hotel in the rue de Calais, and installed there his remarkable collection of Japanese and Indian bric-à-brac. But the change seemed to mark the end of an epoch in his life. He was no longer so strong as he had been.

Stevens lived to be quite an old man. Though he was always considered a great painter by those who should know, his *vogue*, to some extent, deserted him. His best pictures were sold. He could not paint for sale others as good. His life wore out with little incident, and he died in August, 1900, of old age. He was one of those unfortunates who have lived too long. Though his best work was still highly appreciated, he was too old to thoroughly savor this appreciation. He was too old to work or to enjoy. But at least one pleasure was given to him. A few years before his death a great exhibition was held at the École des Beaux-Arts of all his works. This was an honor which till then had only been accorded to a few great artists, and to these after their death. Stevens in a sense tasted of his own immortality, and perhaps something of the bitterness of old age was taken from him.

Stevens has been praised for various qualities, and first as a painter of women; for men seldom appear in his canvases, and if they do it is in a secondary sense. For instance, in one of his studio scenes the artist watches his model preparing for the sitting. But for the most part men do not appear at all. This big, broad-shouldered painter, a cavalry-officer in appearance, *Le Beau Sabreur*, as he was sometimes called, delighted in painting little nervous, modern women, doing the various delightfully unimportant things that so often make up their lives. While he would not have called himself a psychologist, yet he was fond of noting the various little *nuances* of expression or of action that float across the life of a modern woman.

For, again, it was *modernité* that interested him. His pictures are wholly of their day and generation. It was the life about him that engaged him. He made no effort to reconstitute the costume or character of a past epoch, but he was quick to notice the characteristic or beautiful expressions of his own time, so that if his pictures had no other worth they still would be, as documents of his period, of great interest to the historian. But of course there was much more than this to his work. It was modern to be sure, but he made no effort, as did contemporary novelists, like Balzac or Zola, to describe the whole Human Comedy, or to render all the characteristic aspects of an era. Rather, in his somewhat restricted sphere, he looked about him, saw what was beautiful, and selected the most charming, even more than the most characteristic, elements.

At the same time, almost unconsciously, he was the painter *par excellence* of the reign of the third Napoleon. His best period coincided with this time — for, though he painted much later, his last works were hardly so good as those of his early and middle life. He had the courage to find the costume of his day beautiful. It has again become the mode to admire the flower-like forms of the crinoline; but Stevens at the very time it existed found the costume of his day beautiful, and painted it delightfully, as it appeared to him.

More than any other painter that one knows, he had the gift to paint the dress of his time realistically, to be sure, and yet in so seductive a manner, with so much of artistry, that his pictures remain delightful, while the pictures of other men of the same time seem *demodé* and grotesque.

Again Stevens has been called an *Intimiste*, whatever that may mean. It is a term that is a little hard to define, this word *Intimiste*; but one may, perhaps, give an idea of what is meant by the word by saying that a man who could paint a few pussy-willows in a glass of water in such a way as to indicate their charm might be called an *Intimiste*, while a man who could dash in a huge mass of red peonies in a brass vase in a decorative manner would, whatever his virtues, hardly be called an *Intimiste*. Not that Stevens painted in the meticulous way demanded in painting pussy-willows, but he did have the gift of suggesting something of the intimate charm of things, although this probably came about merely because he made them very well.

And this brings us to Stevens's real quality—that he was a great *painter*. Probably a man never lived who better understood the value and interest of paint in itself. His work looked, as the French say, good enough to eat. And yet this does not really express its charm, for it was something beyond that. He brought the charm of surface, of paint quality, of excellent brush-work to such a point that one felt it to be a very important matter—more important, indeed, than it really is. In looking at his work, at his best things, one is tempted to think that these matters of brush-work, of appetizing surface, of *belle pâte*, of *la bonne peinture*, in short, are matters of the first importance; that nothing else, indeed, matters very much if only these qualities are well secured.

But Stevens would have been the last man to have said this himself. And it is on account of his other very real qualities of justness of observation, of truth in rendering, his sense of beauty, especially of the beauty of color,—these things are what cause him to be taken very seriously by the most competent artists. Although he was a past master in the art of brush-work, it was Van Eyck who had his admiration rather than Rubens. One of his aphorisms was that before one could paint a mustache with one stroke of the brush it was necessary to learn to paint it hair by hair. His brush-work was, so to say, a mere by-product of his artistry; for he understood perfectly well that the great qualities of a work of art are things beyond mere smartness of handling. It is as a great painter *par excellence* that he will be chiefly known. For when a group of artists are gathered together, and the qualities of great modern artists are under discussion, it is Stevens in the end who is spoken of as the modern man who combined in himself most of the gifts of a painter.

Stevens's best work keeps "*le juste milieu*," and yet this is not the result of timidity, but of level-headedness,—of calm Flemish joy in the handsome aspect of things. There is charm to his work—undoubted charm. But in his best work it is a by-product as we have said, never gained at the expense of truth, solid technique, or unaffected arrangement. It is apparently unconscious, a something in the man which informed each figure he made. His technique is the despair of painters,—perfectly sound, logical, direct,—and

yet there is a charm to it, an appetizing quality which the most *enragé* paint teazers never get.

One asks one's self what it is that makes him so great, and it may be this: that he begins (at a point in technique far beyond where most painters leave off) to embroider flowers of charm, and even sentiment, on the solidly woven canvas. His technique is at the same time the soundest and most appetizing of his time, and this makes one think of one of his own sayings, "We don't disquiet ourselves enough in these days about *execution, metier*, painting for painting's sake; but we shall be forced to go back to it — and only those who possess this master quality are assured of immortality."

What makes Alfred Stevens more than a mere fashionable painter of pretty women is the probity and justness of his vision and of his technique. He might have been immensely more popular than he was had he chosen to paint merely pretty faces. But his types, though often of a curious beauty, are seldom what one would call really pretty. The slight and curious perversions from the ideal were just what interested him. He was so enamoured of Life and Truth that he preferred to paint the charming women about him just as they were, making no effort to twist their features to some ideal type.

One thing that makes Stevens different from other men is his style. His pictures remind one at first sight of the little Dutch masters, yet they are really essentially different. He had all a Belgian's love of paint as paint. The best Dutch work seemed to transcend all paint or painter's quality and come to something very like the real thing, the very aspect of nature. With Stevens, although his pictures are often surprisingly true, one always feels the stylist. He had a way of putting on paint,—one feels a little the clever stroke,—though he was intelligent enough to try to subdue this.

Stevens's technique is said to have been somewhat as follows: he painted in his picture, presumably upon a careful drawing, in square touches of thick, fat paint. This first painting was done *de premier coup* or *alla prima*. That is, it was not made over a *frotté*, or rub-in, but painted directly on the white canvas, touch by touch, with deliberation. Great care was taken to keep the surface smooth. Any irregularity or roughness of surface was smoothed down with a palette knife. And this first painting formed the basis of that famous *email*, or enamel, that Stevens's admirers were always talking about. Furthermore, when this was thoroughly dry and hard, it was rubbed down as smoothly as possible with pumice-stone. On this subsequent repaintings and "glazes" were made, but the enameled surface of the canvas was carefully retained.

Later Stevens came to paint much more freely. He was more sure of himself, put the color on very directly, and grew to value, partly on account of the ill-advised praise of friends, the clever, brilliant look of his brush-strokes. One of his paintings, which was shown in the Exposition of 1889, was a curious example of this. He had been painting an important picture called 'The Salon,' and, wishing to try the effect of certain changes in his color-scheme, he put a glass over the picture, and where he wished to make changes, there he painted on the glass. A connoisseur coming in admired the fresh juicy touch

of the master so much that he persuaded him to carry the sketch made on glass to a certain sort of completion. The picture was interesting as a *tour de force*, with its brilliant little touches of paint directly put on.

Stevens's drawing was really very good, and yet a little lacking in refinement. That is, although he had studied under Ingres, his drawing had none of that subtlety which the name Ingres suggests to one's mind. On the other hand, his proportions are always admirable. One feels that just about thus and thus sat the figure; that the head was just so large in relation to the body. He is not above getting one eye too high for the other; but the great thing about his drawing is that it is always that of an artist. There is always a sense of style to it, even though it be a painter's style rather than a draftsman's.

It has been said that while Stevens's composition is not always good, his design is always fine. The present writer would put it just the other way. Usually his composition was fairly good. That is, he pushed the figures and furniture about until they were fairly well placed, each in relation to the others, and his color composition was almost always good and often beautiful. But his sense of pattern, of the arabesque, as Mr. George Moore would put it, is not so marked nor yet so subtle as with Whistler or with Albert Moore.

If, then, Stevens pushed about his little figures and bits of furniture till they made a fairly good arrangement, in the matter of design, he was hardly so successful. The design, the arabesque, or silhouette of his main groups was the last thing he thought of. His pictures were not the result of a profound study of rhythm and repetition in line. It is true that sometimes, as in the 'Billet de Faire Part' (Plate x) the arrangement of line comes rather handsomely; but in many of his pictures there is no particular arrangement of line at all. The fact is, one must always think of him as a painter first and foremost. He often got other qualities as well, but it is evident that qualities of color and effect were his first preoccupation.

The gesture of Stevens's little figures, while always sufficient and characteristic, is seldom of the sort that engrosses one. Necessarily in pictures of his sort that was a quality which became secondary. His little people were of the modern kind, who, whatever they may feel, make but little expression of emotion beyond a raised eyebrow or the corner of a lip turned down. On the other hand, he understood perfectly well how to make the action of his figures express the style and manner of their little world. His puppets are *mondaines*, and every movement shows the languid grace of *une dame du monde*.

Stevens has been rather obscured by the vogue of Whistler on the one hand and of the Impressionists on the other. But there is little doubt that he will come to his own some day. Speaking of Whistler, by the way, it may be said that Stevens, together with Degas, was almost the only modern painter of whom he ever spoke with respect. They were quick to perceive his tactical error and never would admit that he was particularly good.

Stevens was a painter's painter, and yet, what does not always happen, a favorite of amateurs *cognoscenti*, and even of the man in the street. His best work — and most of his best work was done before the Franco-Prussian War — was of marvelous quality. Very "fat" in *facture*, and yet pushed to quite

a surprising state of finish. His pictures are good bric-à-brac; they have an amusing surface quality, and yet they are good art as well. They look, the best of them, very much like nature. Only he was a charmer. He told the truth in a delightfully seductive manner. Next to the charm of his *facture* perhaps his color is his most admirable quality. This color has nothing sweet or pretty about it, and yet there is a rarity, a distinction to it, which is very fine and satisfying.

As a colorist Stevens was, indeed, remarkable. He had the gift to make harmonies of color. As a matter of fact he had made symphonies in gray, in yellow, or in blue, before Whistler was known at all as a painter. Only he did not call them symphonies. But he could always vary his color and introduce a note or notes of opposing or complementary color, always with perfect tact and discretion, so that the contrast came as a relief or divertisement, but never as a jarring note. Apart from his color-schemes his coloring of flesh was excellent; so much so that one is never particularly conscious of the color of the flesh. It simply looks right in the general harmony of things.

Stevens had so many good points that it is hard to fix on one in particular. But surely this quality of color was one of the things in which he excelled. His color was not only beautiful in itself and in detail, but also the general color-scheme of his pictures was almost always beautiful. One often remembers his pictures by the color-scheme, although his drawing in his best period is perfectly good. It is difficult, too, to analyze the charm of his color. While the separate tones are handsome enough of themselves, it is by their relations to other tones that they are most beautiful; and this, indeed, is a mark of the true colorist,—that in making a tone he thinks always of the other colors in the picture.

One of our most brilliant and able modern portrait-painters has said that Stevens's best work is the equal or even at times superior to that of the Little Masters of Holland,—men like Vermeer, Terborch, and Metz. Great painter as Stevens was, it yet seems that this praise is somewhat excessive. He never carried his work so far as the best Dutch work has gone and, at the same time, he never quite attained to their wonderful *ensemble*. His work has all the charm of *modernite*, and the charm, too, that a *mondaine* air can give, so that the thoughtless might give him the palm over the *bourgeois* creations of the Dutch painters. But if he has the charm of modernness he also has something of its defects. His work, like almost all modern work, is petulant. It lacks the fine calmness, sobriety, and simplicity which seem to have been the secret of the old men. There is no more instructive contrast than that between his work and that of the greater elder men. He knew their work thoroughly, he delighted in it; and with no effort to imitate it he did, nevertheless, try for many identical qualities in his own work. His own work was very remarkable—among painters it is regarded as the work of the nineteenth century which, technically, is the most impeccable. At the same time, when one compares his work with, let us say, a fine Metz, to speak of a man not the greatest of Dutch painters, one perceives that the work of the elder man is superior. If it lacks the *allure* which Stevens certainly possessed, it is, on the other hand,

more highly finished, and at the same time simpler in effect. The touch is more limpid. The color, though not so brilliant, is really finer; and the drawing, at least in the case of Metz, is more nervous, subtler, and more correct.

In the case of De Hooch, one of course perceives that his figures are immensely inferior to those of Stevens, both in construction and in finish. On the other hand, Stevens never even began to attain the wonderful chiaroscuro, the sense of light and air, that was De Hooch's birthright. Stevens, indeed, was first and always a figure painter, and a painter of still-life, stuffs, and textures. His interior effects are usually good enough to escape criticism, but are not remarkable for atmosphere. Again, with Vermeer, while Stevens's colorations are more opulent, he never arrives at the Dutchman's power of design, his sense of light and shade, and of atmosphere. Nor is his color so subtle and beautiful, even though it is more sumptuous.

Stevens's relations with the Impressionists were rather curious. He was at one time a good friend of Manet and, indeed, did him many good turns by helping him to sell his pictures. Later a coolness developed between the two men. It is said to have been caused by the exhibition of Manet's 'Le Bon Bock,' a portrait of Dumoulin, the engraver, about to drink a "bock," or glass, of beer. Stevens on seeing the picture remarked, "It is good, but he is drinking beer of Harlem." This meant that Manet's painting suggested too much the work of the famous Franz Hals, of Harlem. Manet never forgave Stevens for this witticism.

The Impressionists perturbed Stevens. He felt that they had a new word to say, but he was too able an executant, he knew his old masters too well, not to also feel that these youngsters spoke their piece haltingly and clumsily.

Whistler was another intimate friend of Stevens. In fact Stevens was one of the few moderns whom Whistler was willing to admit as a well-equipped and able painter. It is a question, indeed, whether Stevens admired so much the work of Whistler. He admired Whistler as *un bel esprit* and as a painter whose work was full of character; but Stevens was too good a painter himself not to see the various shortcomings of Whistler's art. The relations between the two men, however, always remained cordial.

At the height of his reputation Stevens commanded magnificent prices. The story is told that Vanderbilt called at his studio and stopped before a picture. "How much?" "Sorry," replied the painter, "but the picture does not belong to me. It is M. Petit's." The man of many millions passed to another picture, asked the same question, and got the same answer. Several times this occurred. At last, stopping before another canvas, he asked, "And this too belongs to M. Petit?" "That one is mine." "And how much?" "Fifty thousand francs." "Then it is yours no longer. It's mine."

A quasi-student of Stevens was Henri Gervex, the painter of the once-famous 'Rolla,' and a man who in his day was a very able painter. Gervex painted Stevens himself, in his high "*chapeau de forme*," a very effective presentation, which Stevens is said not to have liked. The two men working together made a huge cyclorama of Paris at different times during the nineteenth century. And while it never attained quite the success it deserved, it

was nevertheless one of the show sights of Paris. Gervex, who was a good portrait-painter, is said to have made the portrait of the famous men such as Hugo, Renan, and De Lesseps, while Stevens painted women, charming or otherwise, such as Madame Récamier, George Sand and Sara Bernhardt.

Stevens had for a number of years in Paris a class in painting for women, and while none of these became very remarkable painters it must be said that his instruction was excellent. The women had a big studio next to that of the master. Here all day they struggled, and here almost every day at evening the master came and criticized their work, now praising it, more often finding defects. He never would let his students see him paint. Like most masters he kept the secret, if it were a secret, of the "pattern in the carpet" to himself. But such of his teachings as have come to us are interesting and stimulating, though sometimes vague and contradictory, as criticism not directed to the work at hand must always seem.

The master wrote a little essay, or collection of apothegms, which he called 'Impressions of a Painter.' No painter has ever written with more intelligence and good sense about his art. His sympathies are very broad, and yet he does not make the mistake so often committed by *cognoscenti* of supposing that there are a hundred equally good ways of doing a thing. He perceives clearly that there is but one right way, and that a man's work is important in so far as he comes near to that right way. Many of these maxims stick in one's head, and a number of them are quoted in another part of this number.

The Art of Stevens

FERDINAND KHNOPFF 'THE ART OF THE LATE ALFRED STEVENS—BELGIAN PAINTER'

WHEN in February, 1900, a group of French painters in Paris, under the presidency of the Comtesse Greffulhe, the *grande dame* of art, obtained for the Belgian painter, Alfred Stevens, the honor (hitherto without precedent for a living artist) of an exhibition at the École des Beaux-Arts, that subtle poet the Comte Robert de Montesquiou wrote a preface for the catalogue, in which he formulated his delicate appreciation of the master in so definite a fashion that I cannot do better than simply transcribe it here in great part:

"Alfred Stevens, the last — and perhaps the first — of those lesser Flemish masters who were great masters, since he surpasses Terborch and yields in no point to Vermeer.

"Stevens, whom I would willingly call the *sonnettiste* of painting, for the art with which, in his exquisite panels, he combines so harmoniously all the sheen of mirrors and satins, of lacquers and enamels, of eyes and of gems.

"Stevens, concerning whom the present sovereign of Flanders might have repeated, on sending him to France (a gift precious above all others), the Duke of Burgundy's words about Van Eyck, 'I send you my best workman!'

“Among the many claims of this subtle monographist of the eternal feminine to our admiration I would signalize the art with which, in his skilful and refined pictures, he varies the *motif* of Woman and Love under the form of that *billet-doux*, so often torn and scattered to the winds like the petals of a white rose; till Stevens might almost be called the ‘*peintre aux billets*,’ as an old Swiss master was once the ‘*peintre aux oeillelets*.’

“I claim another merit for him — for that future of his which already exists in the present — in his contribution to the history of costume. In the retrospective view of Alfred Stevens’s canvases we find the curious fashions of the Second Empire, and especially those Indian cashmere shawls of which Stevens will ever remain the unique painter, as was his master Vermeer of Delft, of those vast unrolled maps which hang azure oceans and many-colored continents on the peaceful walls of Dutch interiors. . . .”

“In December, 1895,” says M. J. Du Jardin, “there was a feast for the eyes in the Maison d’Art, Avenue de la Toison d’or, Brussels. Here were to be found collected together the greater number of the works of the celebrated artist. He has obtained — let us put it on record — all the highest distinctions and official honors to which he attaches great importance, while honestly doubting whether he had deserved them.”

And this was, indeed, an entire feminine world, which justified the following noteworthy remarks by Camille Lemonnier:

“I recognize two great painters of womanhood in the present century,— Alfred Stevens and François Millet. Poles asunder as they are in their point of view they have, in their two methods of understanding her, summed up the modern woman from one extreme to the other. Millet’s woman does not live; she gives life to others. Stevens’s lives herself and gives death to others. The atmosphere breathed by the former is eternally refreshed by the winds, and is bounded only by the great open firmament. The latter, on the contrary, breathing an atmosphere of poison, stifles in mystery, paint, and perfumes. . . . Alfred Stevens and François Millet open out in their women great vistas into the unknown. They each present the problem of woman, and pose her in the attitude of an ancient sphinx. The world of woman touches the world of man, moreover, at so many points that to paint woman is to paint us all, from the cradle to the grave. It will be the characteristic mark of the art of this century that it has approached contemporary life through woman. Woman really forms a transition between the painting of the past and the painting of the future.”

ALFRED STEVENS

‘IMPRESSIONS OF A PAINTER’

THE public easily confound romance with the true artistic poetry.

One can by instinct become a painter of worth, but one can’t do a work of genius save by showing great good sense.

The sincere approbation of his confrères is for a painter the most flattering of recompenses.

So many painters stop when the hard part begins.

One comes into the world a draftsman just as one is born a colorist.

They ought to have an exhibition every five years where each artist could only expose a single figure which "says nothing."

They ought to take from the Louvre more than fifteen hundred pictures.

Woe unto the painter who only obtains the approbation of women!

One is only a great painter on condition of being a master workman.

One must know how to paint a mustache hair by hair before one permits one's self to wipe it in with a single stroke of the brush.

Nothing hurts a good picture more than bad neighbors.

A fine picture of which one admires the effect at a distance ought equally to bear analysis when one looks at it near to.

The critic of art has a penchant to occupy himself more with the literary side than with the technical part.

True artists have a preference for "*les belles laides*."

We must be of our own time: we must submit to the influence of the sun, of the country in which we dwell, of our early education.

A man does not understand his art well under a certain age.

One should learn to draw with the brush as soon as possible.

Execution is style in painting.

Even a mediocre painter who paints his own period will be more interesting to futurity than one who, with more talent, has only painted times which he has never seen.

A picture can only be judged justly ten years after its execution.

Painters who depict their own time become historians.

We can judge another artist's sensibility from a flower that he has painted.

In the art of painting one must first of all be a painter; the thinker comes afterwards.

A picture should not, as is commonly said, stand out from its frame; the very opposite should be said.

Time beautifies sound painting and destroys bad.

Bad painting cracks in stars; good painting becomes like fine crackle china.

To paint modern costume does not constitute a modernist. The artist attracted by modernity must above all be impregnated with a modern feeling.

By looking at the palette of a painter, we may know with whom we have to reckon.

The execution of a fine painting is agreeable to the touch.

A true painter is always a thinker.

Certain Dutch masters seem to have painted with precious stones ground into powder.

To have a master's picture retouched is a crime that ought to be severely punished by law.

Nothing is pardoned in a single figure picture; many things are excused in a picture with several figures.

Painting is not done for exhibitions; refined work is smothered at the Salon; "shouters" come off better.

Nothing can equal the happiness felt by a painter when, after a day's labor,

he is satisfied with the work accomplished; but in the contrary case what despair is his!

The Flemings and the Dutch are the first painters in the world.

An arm by Rembrandt, though perhaps too short, is yet alive; an arm by the proficient in theory, though exact in proportion, remains inert.

Rubens has often been of harm to the Flemish School, while Van Eyck has never been anything but its benefactor.

KENYON COX

‘PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS’

BETWEEN 1820 and 1830 men began to wish to paint again. They were no longer willing to do without color or the delight of free and beautiful handling, and they tired of restricting their art to the delineation of Greek and Roman heroes with straight noses and curly hair. The love of light and color took them to the Orient, or they looked at the pictures of Rubens and Veronese and began to paint the Middle Ages and the Renaissance because they loved silks and brocades better than abstract draperies. Gradually it dawned upon them that the old masters had painted their own times and that they might do the same. They went into the fields and painted the landscape they saw there,—Troyon began to paint cattle, Millet to paint peasants, Courbet to paint the *bourgeoisie*. Finally, about 1860, they dared again the fashionable lady, not merely in portraiture, but as the subject of a picture. The last of the academic restrictions on the subject-matter of art was swept away.

And so we come back to the name with which we set out, that of Alfred Stevens, for no man has painted the modern woman of fashion as well as he. A Belgian by birth and early training, a Parisian by choice, he combined the wit and elegance of his adopted city with something of the old Dutch and Flemish schools,—the result being an art of his own with a flavor unlike any other. Manet and Whistler were just beginning their careers when Stevens was doing some of his best work, for there is charm in the sound and quiet painting of the sixties that I do not find to the same extent in that later work which shows him as the cleverest of virtuosi. Terborch or Vermeer, who told no stories, might not have understood the delicate mixture of irony and sentiment in such pictures as ‘Une Mère’ or ‘Une Veuve,’—they would hardly have cared for the fine literary skill and the exquisite restraint with which the incidents are presented,—but assuredly they would have appreciated the just notation of light and color, the perfect drawing, the absolute rendering of substance and texture. They would have seen in him a craftsman of their own lineage, a pupil of whom they might be proud. In ‘La Dame Rose,’ of the Brussels Museum, they would have found a picture after their own hearts, and while they might miss something of its serious beauty in his later canvases, neither they nor any true painter that ever lived could fail to admire the combination of subtle tone and color, with extreme ease and brilliancy of manipulation, which makes them almost unique in art. For us there is the added interest in the earlier paintings that the dresses of forty years ago have already become historic costumes, and have taken on, as such, a picturesqueness which we cannot yet find in those of twenty years later, which are merely out of fashion.

The Works of Stevens

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PLATES

‘THE LADY WITH A FAN’

PLATE I

THE picture of ‘The Lady with a Fan’ was painted in what may be called Stevens’s early middle period. He had come to a freedom greater than in his earlier works. At the same time, he made his pictures out of full “fat” paint, in a manner quite different from his rather dry later period. This particular picture is a sort of “symphony in yellow,” for symphonies in color were made by Stevens quite as early as by Whistler. With the yellow came certain brown tones as, for instance, the gloves.

The reason for being of the picture is, apart from the color arrangement, the beautiful effect of shadow made visible by reflected light, which one sees on the head. This picture was exhibited in 1890, the first year of the so-called New Salon or Salon of the Champs de Mars. Stevens was one of the dissenting artists from the “Old” Salon, and gladly became a *sociétaire* in the New. This picture was one of a panel of paintings by Stevens, which had been borrowed from the owners. It formed a sort of retrospective exhibition of his work and was greatly admired. This picture of the lady in yellow had a particular success, and was by many considered one of the finest things the Belgian painter had done. It is one of the handsomest paintings in color that Stevens made, and color was his strong point.

‘A MORNING IN THE COUNTRY’

PLATE II

THIS little scene of young people enjoying country life is one of the most delightful of Stevens’s, and curiously enough is one of the very few of his early pictures which represent *plein air* or outdoors. This effect is passably well indicated; but the picture, having been made before the great interest in outdoor work, depends for its success on other qualities than those made famous by the Impressionists.

This is one of Stevens’s good compositions. The “spotting,” or balancing, of the different white masses one with another, and of the various dark spaces each with each, is very well managed. The skilful way in which the white book is made to break up a rather large dark mass is an admirable touch, and the introduction of the dog, just in the right place, with touches of white and of black to serve as “rappels” to other masses — light and dark — is really quite a triumph.

‘THE LADY IN BLUE’

PLATE III

ANOTHER picture which appeared in the first exhibition of the Champs de Mars was ‘The Lady in Blue.’ This picture, while rather slight, was painted at the very summit of Stevens’s career, when he had worked out of the tightness of his earlier style and had not yet fallen into the rather thin

technique of his later days. To begin with, the costume, though rather quaint to our modern eyes, is charming. The color arrangement, too, which unfortunately cannot be judged in this reproduction, is delightful. It is in different shades of blue with certain strong notes of black which give the picture force. The hands, while not drawn with the incisiveness of an Ingres, are yet indicated with delightful skill, and the weary little head, far more than the painter's 'Sphinx Parisien,' deserves to be called sphinx-like. There is an air of weariness about the little lady. She looks, as the Irish say, as if her heart was broke for pleasure. The fashion of the hair, which one finds in drawings by Du Maurier of a parallel date, is of a quaint charm which recalls the days of chignons and of "waterfalls."

This picture in particular is what has been called a painter's picture. Apart from the skilful painting of the head and hands, the indication of the ruffles about the hands, and the masses of black which give relief and accent to the whole thing, are touched in a very knowing way. Also note the little album, apparently of *cartes-de-visite*, which is indicated in a clever manner.

'EVERY JOY'

PLATE IV

'**T**OUS LES BONHEURS' ('Every Joy') is, perhaps, a rather sentimental title, for Stevens could be sentimental with the best. Sometimes he was a little too much so, as in his picture of the young widow with a cupid sticking his head out from under the table. But in this case the sentiment is that which might truly hang about a "thing seen," and is indeed quite legitimate and unforced. The young mother, who has just come in to nurse her child (the gloves thrown on the floor are little touches in Stevens's earlier anecdotic manner); the child so intent on its business and so unconscious; all the pieces, like the crib with its pretty detail of a little picture of the Madonna hanging inside;—all these things go to make up a picture of a great deal of charm of sentiment and of execution.

The dress, of a brown velvet, is painted in a sumptuous way, while the cashmere shawl, so beloved by Stevens, and so characteristic of the epoch of the third Napoleon, is rendered with great exactitude, and yet in nowise unduly attracts our attention. Everything, indeed, is very much of its epoch—of a style which we no longer count beautiful, and yet Stevens, by sheer power of painting, has made it interesting, existent, and also of a certain vague sentimental *allure*.

'A JAPANESE MASK'

PLATE V

THE interesting things about this picture are Stevens's effort to arrange two markedly antagonistic types one against the other and the sense of repeated lines which one gains from the attitude of the two heads and back. The same sort of subject has been done a good deal, but it should be remembered that Stevens was among the first to do it. As to the mask, one wishes that the high-light in the eye did not shine so glaringly. It is one of the few cases where Stevens has indicated a false value. On the other hand, there is a rhythm of repeated line in this composition rather unusual with Stevens.

'MISS FAUVETTE'

PLATE VI

'MISS FAUVETTE' is in Stevens's most sprightly vein. Why he called it "Miss" Fauvette does not appear. To a painter the interest in the head and figure comes largely from the fine effect of reflected light. It is interesting, also, to note how delightfully Stevens has painted the crinoline, which by many has been considered unpaintable. But here it gives a flower-like look to the design and is distinctly charming in effect. Charming, too, is the black hat, with its long ostrich plume, and the inevitable shawl thrown across the chair. Stevens's composition while never very original is, on the other hand, always rather studied in regard to details. Sometimes, indeed, he puts in too much detail. In this picture the relations of the figure with its environment are well considered.

'THE VISIT'

PLATE VII

THIS 'Visit,' where one charming little lady peeks from behind a screen at another pretty creature who, in a luminous obscurity seems dreaming of nothing in particular, marks the beginning of a gradual change in Stevens's composition from the anecdotic to the sort where an arrangement is made and painted purely for its own beauty. The real artistic reason for being of this picture is the contrast between the delicate half-light of the figure behind the screen with the full light on the face which is nearer us. Stevens was such a realist that he sometimes obscured his own intention by the relentless way in which he finished the details. And in this picture bits like the tassels about the painting on the wall, and the very marked design on the Japanese screen, almost destroy one's perception of the above stated chief motive for the picture's existence. At the same time these things are in themselves delightfully done, and Stevens had this in common with that Van Eyck whom he so much admired, that he could push details to the furthest limit without greatly injuring the effect of his picture. This came about from various reasons, but one of these reasons was that his light and dark arrangement is usually pretty good; that is, he arranged with skill the balance of light masses and the contrasting masses of dark. Having, then, his general effect in light and dark masses quite strongly indicated, he was the better able to carry the detail in these things to a quite remarkable extent.

'CONSOLATION'

PLATE VIII

'CONSOLATION' is quite in the nature of a subject picture, and yet it is evident enough that the young Stevens was particularly interested in the fine contrast of black and white in his arrangement. The heads and the little figures are not made with that *preciosité* which distinguished Stevens's later technique; but they are very well made none the less. Indeed, it may be said that on the whole Stevens's earlier work was better made than his later. Here the technique is a little "tight," as painters would say, but hardly more so than that of the best Dutch masters. The way in which the white handkerchief is contrasted against the black glove is skilfully managed, and the

contrast of different textures, as always with Stevens, is well observed. The white crinoline dress, far from being ridiculous, has a full flower-like aspect which one misses in the dress of to-day.

It must be admitted that the types of face are hardly so individual and interesting as those Stevens later came to paint. On the other hand, the skill with which every detail is made, without at all injuring the general effect, is remarkable. Among the interesting bits we may notice the wall paper, which is made in the extremest detail, every bit of the design being studied out, while, at the same time, the wall stays flat. Apart from its artistic merits, the picture will always have its particular interest as a document of life and manners in the reign of the third Napoleon.

‘UN SPHINX PARISIEN’

PLATE IX

‘UN SPHINX PARISIEN’ is perhaps not so very sphinx-like after all. Stevens was not primarily a psychologist. While as a man of the world he was interested in all things, his real talent lay in painting the beautiful things. Here the arms are delightfully made, better drawn than in many of Stevens’s works. The effect of light coming from behind with its relation to the reflected light on the front of the figure is well considered. Note also the skilful way in which the black masses are introduced as foils to the white dress. When we come to examine the face we find it interesting, *mutine*, perhaps no more sphinx-like than the face of any pretty woman.

‘LE BILLET DE FAIRE PART’

PLATE X

‘LE BILLET DE FAIRE PART’ is one of the best of Stevens’s compositions, with its discreetly *triste* figure cutting the upright gilt lines on the wall. The picture, too, is well placed in relation to the figure, and the chair and table are in good position except that to our eyes, accustomed to “Arts and Crafts” styles, the design of the table does not look very handsome. While the pattern on the carpet is rather confused and, indeed, quite ugly, on the other hand it is painted with great skill. The way in which the floor is made to “lie flat” is remarkable. It has been pointed out that the hands are rather small, but they are very prettily painted. The face, too, with its discreetly arranged dark bonnet, telling well against the white ground, is quite charming.

Stevens seldom painted a face that one would call really pretty except in his earliest pictures. In these he proved that he could make a pretty face if he chose. But later he came to be interested in the *espiègle* or world-weary types of the Second Empire which, while not exactly beautiful, had a charm which is not always found with regular features. Possibly Stevens would be more widely known if he had painted strictly pretty faces. As it was, his paintings were for the most part quickly snapped up by connoisseurs and, till quite recently, have not been much reproduced. So that his pictures, while quite well known to artists and dilettanti, are hardly known at all to a great mass of people who love art.

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL PAINTINGS BY STEVENS
IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

BELGIUM. ANTWERP, MUSEUM OF BEAUX-ARTS: Hopelessness; The Parisian Sphinx (Plate ix)—BRUSSELS, COLLECTION OF MME. DE BAUER: The Confinement—COLLECTION OF MME. VE CARDON: Remember; The Visit (Plate vii); The Hungarian Pianist—COLLECTION OF M. E. CLAREMBOUX: View of Cape Martin—COLLECTION OF J. and A. LEROY BROS.: The Soldiers of Vincennes—COLLECTION OF M. LEQUIME: Lady Knitting—COLLECTION OF THE LATE M. E. MARLIER: The Morning in the Country (Plate ii)—ROYAL MUSEUM: Every Joy (Plate iv); The Studio; Autumn Flowers; The Lady in Rose-color—COLLECTION OF M. A. SAERENS: Fedora; The Japanese Mask (Plate v); Le Billet de Faire Part (Plate x)—COLLECTION OF M. F. ROHERS: Revery—COLLECTION OF M. P. DU TOICT: Revery—COLLECTION OF M. R. WARACQUE: The Last Day of Widowhood; The Four Seasons; The Cup of Tea—**FRANCE.** PARIS, LUXEMBOURG: The Passionate Song—COLLECTION OF MME. LA PRINCESSE BORGHESE: Cruel Certainty—PROPERTY OF DURAND-RUEL: The Visitor—COLLECTION OF M. C. GAUSCO: The Lady in Yellow (Plate i)—COLLECTION OF M. G. V. HUGO: Miss Fauvette (Plate vi)—COLLECTION OF M. E. LEROY: Idleness—COLLECTION OF M. LHERMITTE: The Lady Bathing—COLLECTION OF M. LE BARON DE MESNIL DE ST. FRONT: Ophelia; Portrait of the Baronne de Mesnil de Saint-Front—COLLECTION OF M. DE COMTE DE MONTESQUIOU: The Mirror—COLLECTION OF M. G. PETIT: The Little Girl and the Duck—COLLECTION OF M. A. ROUX: The Drawing-room—COLLECTION OF M. L. SARLIN: The Visit to the Studio—**GERMANY.** BERLIN, COLLECTION OF M. L. RAVENA: Consolation (Plate viii).

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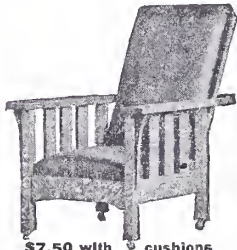
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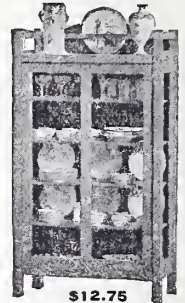
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