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"ART AND PROGRESS"

VERMEER OF DELFT

BY A. E. GALLATIN

PETERBOROUGH

THE EDWARD MACDOWELL MEMORIAL COLONY

SCULPTURE

*(A Report of Progress)*

BY HERMON A. MACNEIL

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my studio and re-establish my forces and adjust my mind to problems that now seemed not difficult."

It was at Peterborough that Edward MacDowell composed the *Norse* and *Keltic Sonatas*, the *New England Idyls*, the *Fire-side Tales*, and many of his finest songs and choruses. It was here that he passed into the other world, and that all that was mortal of him is now buried—not in a cemetery but on a hill top. His grave is

marked by a great boulder and is in a small enclosure quite overgrown with flowers. There is no shade, the sun floods it, the winds blow across it, the way is open to all. The place is gay with the song of birds, bright with the color of blossoms. There is no suggestion of the sadness of death but rather of the joyous confidence of immortality, the message of art, and of the life whose influence extends indefinitely beyond the grave.

## THE ART AND WORK OF THEODORE STEELE

BY ALFRED M. BROOKS

**A**RT can work miracles. The power to metamorphize canvases into mirrors, power possessed by numberless painters, is not miracle-working power. It is not art although it may be painting; technically, even remarkable painting. To be a painter by no means makes an artist. Every artist must know how to paint, but few painters are artists. To transform a canvas into a mirror; to draw and paint a subject—hills, fields, sea, and sky, whatever goes to make up a landscape, in such manner as to approximate an absolute reflection of the subject; consciously to seek to do this, and nothing more, is to seek to do what the camera can do better. I would not be thought to decry the difficulty, or to belittle the paramount necessity of being able to draw objects in their right relative sizes and to color them in their true hues. It is as necessary to the artist as it is to a writer to have vocabulary, and to use it grammatically. An essential means. Not a great end. The point is that art implies a great end which, painting, as such, no matter how good technically, does not. The painter is the man who tells us, in correct shapes and colors, how things look in what ordinarily passes as the actual world. He does with his medium something closely analogous to that which the reporter does in words, when writing a description. As reporters range high and low along the scale of values so do painters. But neither becomes an artist until he begins to pro-

duce something more than merely accurate transcripts; until he ceases to be minor-minded only; until he gives over trying to rival the camera. What then is this something more?

It is the miracle-working power of the artist; the miracle-working power of the poet. It is the capacity of the painter-artist, writer-artist, to raise mere lines, forms, shadows, colors; mere words, prose or verse, to the level at which they become art. It is what we glibly call creative power, genius, but which we rarely understand, or, the unheralded signs of, recognize. The painter tells only what he sees. The artist tells what he sees plus something of what he thinks and feels about what he sees. In this case what he thinks and feels amounts to nothing less than a record of his rational and emotional reactions. He is the man who lifts himself above the highest mechanical reaches, and acts the part of a creature endowed with mind. His work is no longer only a reflection of that which he has seen with his eye. It becomes a thoughtful, possibly an inspired reflection upon what he has so seen. The soul of him has become concerned as well as his body, his hand. His work of art, the picture which he makes, is a miracle. It is the precipitate, so to speak, on canvas of a human being's awe and joy in the presence of God and nature. From the hills cometh this man's help; from the hills, and every other part of that visible creation which bespeaks invisible and



SPRING

THEODORE STEELE

immeasurable force. He has himself been moved. What he paints has in turn the power to move others. Unless it has this power it is not art. He makes his work of art, his picture, the vessel of his intuitions. Every touch of his pencil declares a twofold reason for existence because it describes physical fact and, at the same time, interprets spiritual meaning. This was put inimitably by the truly magnanimous Japanese landscape artist, Hokusai, when he wrote: "I hope that at eighty I may have arrived at a certain power of intuition. . . which will develop so that at the age of one hundred I can proudly assert that my intuition is thoroughly artistic. And, should it be given to me to live to the age of one hundred and ten, I hope that a vital and true comprehension of nature may radiate from every one of my lines and dots."

To make his picture radiate vital comprehension of nature is an appallingly accurate account of what an artist does when he paints; of what his work will continue to do so long as it shall exist. The purpose of a work of art is to inform, interpret, illumine and inspire, as well as delight. Doing less than this it may still be very valuable or useful. Doing these things it becomes invaluable. The author of such work has been initiated into the most secret of secret societies; into the

most aristocratic of all societies, that of the real wonder-workers. His degree may be high or low. The important point is the validity of his membership. Every mark of his brush as it travels to and fro over the canvas is made *con amore*, and with accuracy. Not the deadly accuracy of which we hear much, and know far too much; the deadly accuracy of him who writes but is no poet; of him who paints but is no artist.

From my knowledge of the man, gained from the twofold source of the man himself, and his work, such as has been described, is, in broad outlines, a true picture of Steele's ideas of art. He is primarily a landscape artist. It is necessary to know what that means, in some specific respects, before considering actual canvases.

Every landscape implies a mood: a state of mind. Every first rate artist is the portrayer of moods. It is at this point that the artist and the camera part company for good. In his portrayal of mood the artist becomes autobiographic. He is invariably this when he is first rate. It is a true observation made by Samuel Butler, "that a great portrait is always more a portrait of the painter than the painted." We should not forget that the landscapist is the portrait painter of nature. To do this thing adequately implies penetrative



SUMMER

THEODORE STEELE

imagination; the power to go to the very heart of your subject; in a world-wide, deep sympathy. An artist possessed of this quality spans the gulf between us and our fellow men; between us and our environment, nature; spans it for us. The bridges which he throws across this gulf, bridges which make possible our passing over from the world of fact into the world of meanings, in a word, from flesh to spirit, are poems and pictures. More of them are being built day by day than most of us suspect, or are willing to recognize; many more than we are willing to use. Kenyon Cox has recently said, "We do not know how good our art is." What a comment upon us!

Let us now turn direct to the work of our artist, the landscapes of one of the good living men amongst us, Theodore Steele; to the second part of what our title calls for. To a remarkable degree he has done a thing unusual though far from unknown, the thing Rembrandt did, spent his life, his best working life, on his native heath. By continued and loving intercourse with it he has learned to know it and to interpret it. For more than a decade now this Dean of the Indiana School, has spent his whole time within the narrow confines of a single, thinly settled county, which, until a few years since, had the distinction of not having a

railroad, and therefore of not having its sweet air, or that blue haze which makes so much of the Ohio River region's unique charm, polluted by locomotive fumes, or its sylvan peace disturbed by engine shriek or factory roar. Brown County is still happily unfouled by the smoke, and din, and dirt of civilization. It is still a place of natural beauty and seclusion. On one of its pretty beech and oak-clad hills, overlooking wide bottom lands of wheat, and upland corn, and beyond, ridge on ridge of wood, lilac in the distance, lives, truly lives, and works, the tranquil poet-minded, artist-handed man, in years approaching three score and ten but youthfully hail, who is possessed of far more Hokusaiian intuitions than most men ever dream of having. Day by day through the changing seasons of year on year he commits his intuitions to canvas; the very life of the woods in their actual aspect, as he understands it, and in them sees it. "In nature beauty dies. In art never." To bestow much of the immortality of art upon the beauty of nature has marked his signally successful efforts. Many men love his pictures. He has had many honors. But best of all, there are the far greater many, yet to find their delight in his work.

On his hill-top, in his valley, up and down the narrow ravine, out over the orchard slopes of his little kingdom he has again



AUTUMN

THEODORE STEELE

and again watched Spring come, and Summer; Autumn and Winter; frost and cold; ice and snow; days and nights; darkness and light; all ye green things, showers and dew; sun, moon and stars; winds and waters; and he has painted them all in such a way as to constitute the sum of his canvases an actual *Benedicite, omnia opera*. He is at one with Ruskin in believing that all great art is praise.

For a large ward in one of the Indianapolis hospitals Steele has recently done four wall decorations. They completely fill great spaces to right and left of opposite entrances. Their subjects are the four seasons; the procession of them as it passed through the bit of nature which he knows so well; the sweet and solemn meaning of their passing on his mind which has heeded them so long, and carefully, and with so much affection. Each of these decorations is a compound of delicious facts, pink clouds of peach-bloom, or fascinating shadow-patterns cast by branches on smooth beech trunks in winter; such facts, and endless more, subdued into orderly arrangements, and compelled into designs of rare decorative effect. They are representation plus art. They alone

should go far towards proving to anyone who doubts it, that representation, an imperative end, is not the chief end of art. On the side of representation it would be difficult to better the anatomy of Steele's trees, for example, those just beyond the sapling stage in the middle-ground of his "Winter." But his grasp of nature's anatomy does not stop with trees. For proof, examine the knife edges of the sheets of frozen snow which overhang his cold brook; in reality cut like Greek marbles, and so depicted here. Or the anatomy of the "Summer" hills, a matter of splendid ponderosity, and so, true, which does not impose itself upon the beholder as the sole and only precious attribute of the subject. But these are things which many men can do, though few can do them better, and not many half so well.

When, however, it comes to the larger considerations of design—filling but not crowding his pictorial areas with sustained passages of interest, and lovely echoes of light and shade, made to play over, and to accentuate, rather than conceal, the highly representative character of the details which make up the purely pictorial nature of the subjects, these "Seasons"





WINTER

THEODORE STEELE

are masterly and, decoratively, masterful. They bespeak the inherent bigness and breadth of the scenes they represent so faithfully. They have detail, anatomy, what we will, provided only that we realize that it is the one thing which establishes their claim to be called good drawing. They have design; intentional arrangement of everything depicted, looking to, and attaining, the artist's purposed goal. Finally, they breathe the inmost spirit of each season, and they represent the artist's mood; the reaction of a poet to the ceaseless yet quiet hum of a July noon; to the rustling blaze of October; to the stillness of winter; to the promise which the annual return of spring makes and keeps.

As different from the brush technique of these large decorative pieces as can be conceived is the handling of his easel pictures. The facile technique of these and the realistic tone which it invariably gives, is, in no sense, revolutionary. I mean that in no sense does it rivet the beholder's thought upon technique, leaving him oblivious or cold to that which the technique conveys. In his most broadly manipulated pictures, and in his most delicate, Steele never fails to emphasize his

consuming love of subject, together with the influence which that particular subject has had on him; in a word, the mood into which it threw him. Again, to put the same meaning into slightly different form, he remains, from first to last, the poet, the artist-painter. What this is may perhaps be understood from "The Oaks" here reproduced. Body and soul of this picture are one. The sentiment of strength and delicacy is a pure amalgam. For composition, in its kind, it would not be easy to match "The Oaks," this side the greatest. In color, but color I have left wholly unmentioned for, as all know, it must be seen to be appreciated; this canvas is tender and powerful to an unusual degree. So is the color of many a canvas by this man of remarkable artistic parts, whose capacity for design, and mastery of drawing, can be measurably judged in photographs, as can Corot's or any other artist's, but whose color cannot be judged any more than that of other artists, unless seen.

Steele's painting is of the sort that in lasting worth is bound to far outlive many a loudly heralded and soon forgotten innovator; forgotten because he is an innovator of mannerisms, has a new tech-



THE OAKS

THEODORE STEELE

nique, is in fine, striking, rather than sound or conservative, *i.e.*, faithful to the great traditions of painting. Through many years he has labored unceasingly at all that technique may be construed to include, but never has this labor for one moment blunted his rapturous joy over the fact of nature as such; never has it deadened his vital perceptions of elemental significance. I mean, the sort of significance which Corot says baffled him when behind a beech tree which he was painting there all day sang a thrush.

To have power, in whatsoever degree, to arrest such significances and make them permanent in paint is to be artist-handed. The technician, as such—no matter how remarkable—must have this power, else he is no artist. The pity is that there are so many technicians who are nothing more. The blessed delight of finding the other and real sort, of whom it is most consoling to believe there are more than is generally supposed, is inestimably satisfying. Theodore Steele is one of these.