

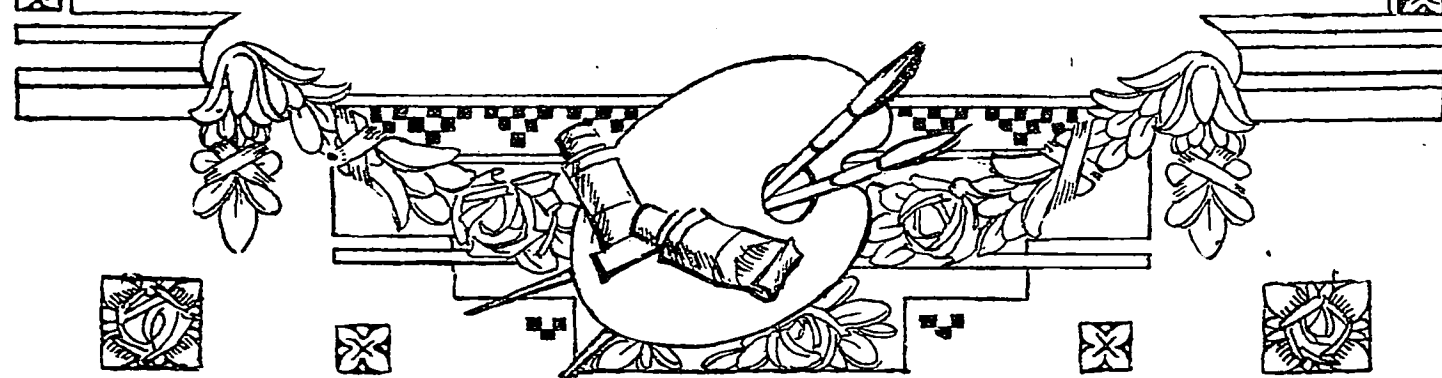
MILLET, SELF-SACRIFICING SERVANT OF AMERICAN ART: WONDERFUL ...

The Washington Post (1877-1922); May 12, 1912; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post

pg. M4

MILLET, SELF-SACRIFICING SERVANT OF AMERICAN ART

Wonderful Personality of Frank Millet, Who, Born a Poor Boy in a Massachusetts Coast Town, Became Soldier, War Correspondent, World Citizen and Foremost Mural Painter in the World—Was Always Ready to Lay Aside His Brush at the Call of Some New Public Work



Copyright, 1912, by the New York Herald Co. All rights reserved.

HIS friends never expected to see Francis Davis Millet alive after they heard that the Titanic had sunk and that women and children had gone down with her.

"If I know Frank Millet," said a very close friend, before the list of survivors of the disaster was known, "he worked to the very last, probably taking care of unprotected, frightened women from the steerage who had none to look after them. We have no hope that he is alive, for after the women and children were safe he would stay to help the men. They couldn't have forced him into a boat unless they could persuade him that his life was of inestimable value to the community at large, and even then they would have to hold him down. At the last, when the water was creeping up to where he stood, I know that he was smiling with the same old smile he wore whether he had ten cents in his pocket or thousands in the bank. That was Frank Millet."

The reports of those who saw him last on the deck of the sinking steamship say that was the way he died. His friends did not put their trust in him in vain.

Millet was a world citizen, at home in almost any part of the globe, but par-

ticularly in Europe or America. Much of his time was spent in Europe, yet years of association with his friends abroad never made him less an American. His speech, his manners and his personality never lost the atmosphere of the sea coast community in which he was born, Mattapoisett, Mass., and this fact furnished one of his chief charms and a source of delight to his English friends.

Drummer Boy in Civil War.

His father was a country doctor, Asa Millet, and his mother was Hulda Byram. As a boy Frank Millet was noted for his quiet energy and his ambition to do things. He could turn his hand to almost anything from pencil sketching to blacksmithing. The first of a long series of services to his country began when he enlisted as a drummer boy in the civil war. He was attached to the Sixtieth Massachusetts Infantry, and before his discharge, despite his youthfulness, was made a surgeon's assistant.

After the war he went to Harvard, where he paid his way by taking photographs. So great became his fame as a photographer that he was sent for by many persons who were willing to pay big prices for his work. In this way and by sketching and writing for the Boston newspapers, he managed to scrape together enough money to buy a reduced passage to Europe, and began his

studies at the Royal Academy of Art, in Antwerp, where he took the gold and silver medals for his work in two successive years.

He always whistled or sang at his work, and this habit clung to him throughout life. In later years he often had a phonograph in the room where he was working and would play it by the hour.

When the new custom house was built in Baltimore Millet was engaged for two years on a set of mural decorations. His contract called for 23 panels besides a large central space, but when Millet found opportunities for several extra panels he painted pictures there instead of making them all one color, as he would have been justified in doing under the contract. He engaged Forest Hall, in Washington, in which to paint the large ceiling piece, for he could not find a studio large enough which suited him in New York. During that task he had a phonograph playing most of the time. Every so often he would inspect the work of his assistants, and if he was particularly pleased he would dance about the room, singing, and whistling.

A War Correspondent.

While he was in Paris studying art he made enough money by writing and sketching for American newspapers to help educate his younger brothers and

sisters in America. When war was declared between Russia and Turkey Millet accompanied the Russian forces as a newspaper correspondent. His work in writing and sketching attracted world-wide attention, and his ability to observe maneuvers and to grasp details of military affairs put him at the front in his profession. His stories of incidents of heroism and little acts which escaped others were looked for eagerly by readers all over the world. Later he acted as correspondent for the London Daily News and the Graphic.

During the campaigns in the Balkans and along the Danube he became a close friend of many of the Russian officers, especially Gen. Swoboleff, and they regarded him as one of their own number. Inventing short cuts to accomplish his purposes was his strong forte, and his Yankee ingenuity always helped him to the easiest and safest way to do things. At one time it helped the Russian army to such an extent that he received a decoration for services.

Decorated by the Czar.

It was at the time of the Russian advance on Plevna. The division to which Millet was attached halted before a wide river which was filled with ice and running very strong because of freshets. The stream, as a rule, was fordable, and the officers were preparing to have the men wade into it when Millet rode to the general in command, and saluting, said: "General, if I may be permitted to make a suggestion, the men who cross that stream on foot will be so nearly frozen and so exhausted after their struggle against the current and the ice floes that they will reach the opposite bank in no condition to storm the batteries on the heights. Besides this, many will perish."

The officer asked him if he could suggest a remedy.

"Very easily," replied the correspondent. "You have a large force of cavalry. Let each counted man take an infantryman on his horse behind him. When all the horses have crossed, send them back to this bank with one man in charge of five or six horses, and each animal will then be able to carry two more men across without their getting wet enough to hurt them."

The idea was acted upon, and the whole division was transferred to the other shore without the loss of a single man. The soldiers were in prime condition for the charge on batteries which were mounted on the hills, and the battle was won by the Russians. For this and many other services he was decorated with the orders of St. Anne and St. Stanislas and with the Bulgarian Iron Cross.

Nicknamed "The Bulgarian."

This gained him the name of "The Bulgarian" in the famous Title Club, among whose members were Edwin A. Abbey, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, William M. Chase, F. Hopkinson Smith, J. Alden

Weir, George W. Maynard, and other men whose names have become international. Francis Millet was the eleventh of the original 22 members of the Title Club to die, which leaves just one-half the members alive.

It was because of Millet that Maj. Archibald Butt was on board the Titanic. Both were friends of President Taft, and during a conversation they had together in the White House the artist said to Mr. Taft:

"I don't think Butt is looking very well. Why don't you let him go over to Europe with me for a few weeks? I'll be responsible for him and see that he gets home safe and sound."

It was immediately arranged, and Maj. Butt was traveling as Mr. Millet's guest.

Fame did not spoil Millet. He never for a moment stood upon his social or official position, although he has been publicly honored by many governments. While in Washington he received a beautifully illuminated document from the Japanese government, conferring upon him the Order of the Sacred Treasure. Millet took the parchment from its wrappings, looked at it, pushed it into a pigeonhole in his desk, and said to his secretary, "That's a mighty pretty thing, isn't it?"

His Unassuming Modesty.

He did not mean to belittle it. It was just his modest, unassuming way. To him the honor was a recognition of his work, not a recognition of himself. No matter what honors came to him, he was always glad to see old friends, in any circumstances, no matter what might be their position. When he finished his paintings for the Baltimore custom house he had a private exhibition in the hall where he had worked. Cards were sent to the President, his cabinet, other officials, the janitor of the building, the scrubwoman, and the grocer, whose store he passed every morning on his way to work. After he had received the President he spent most of his time putting the humbler guests at their ease, and his manner was as pleasant and as respectful to one as to another.

Millet was the American who discovered the beauties and possibilities of Broadway, a little village not far from London, as a seat for country homes. Abbey, Parsons, Sargent, and other friends joined him there, and the village became famous as a resort of American artists. He restored an abbey near Broadway, and his own home he almost rebuilt in exact Elizabethan style. No detail was too small for him to work on with the utmost care. He would make a special trip to London, Paris, or Rome to study records or drawings to determine some point like the form of a shoe or the exact type of headgear in painting a picture which involved classical costume.

When he was working on his house, hanging decorations or reconstructing



CONTINUED ON FIFTH PAGE.

Millet Samaritan To American Art

CONTINUED FROM FOURTH PAGE

some delicate work with his own hands, he would even insist on having the nails a certain size. If he could not get one to suit him he would go to his workshop and forge one himself.

Millet had a kind, quizzical face, with fans of wrinkles trailing back from his eyes; the weather seamed face of a man who had sailed many seas and journeyed through many lands. Whenever he stopped he was the center of a group of friends, and he was known in Washington, New York, Paris, Rome, or any other city. Once in Tokyo, Japan, a friend with whom he was traveling, said to him:

"Well, Millet, at last we are in a place where you are not known."

A few minutes later a waiter in the restaurant where they were dining, went to the table and addressed Mr. Millet by name. He had been with the Japanese delegation sent to the World's Fair at Chicago, where Millet was art director.

His Inventive Genius.

His inventive genius was noticeable in his work there. The vast interiors to be painted and the heroic size of the figures made the task of mural painting seem almost insurmountable, but Millet invented a machine to spray the color on. Stereopticon slides were made and images thrown on the wall, the exact size, and color which the picture was to be. Then the color was sprayed on by men who were furnished with the proper pigments.

Before the Windsor Hotel fire he had a studio over a drug store in Fifth avenue, New York, across the street from the hotel. In order not to tire the model and also to save a little money, for he was not affluent in those days, he would have the model pose for a time, then make a photograph, which he could study and which would keep the pose always before him.

While he was busiest with important commissions his joy was to take a day off and go to a circus or go fishing with some old friend. In the evening he delighted in trying the dishes at some small cafe in an obscure corner. A good cigar and a mug of real German beer in the mustiest old cafe he could find with some friend he had known in his tramps through the Balkans was his idea of the acme of pleasure.

Millet's strongest characteristic was unselfishness, which too often involved the neglect of his own interests and affected the success he certainly would have made in his profession. He was too ready to lay down his brushes at the call of some new public work, and the more eager if it was an opportunity to further the cause of American art. It was just at the time when he had won his success in London and had sold a picture at the Tate Gallery for £1,000 that he was called to the world's fair, at Chicago. He forgot his opening career in London and turned to America because he felt that he could serve American art.

No Sacrifice Too Great.

On another occasion, when in England, he abandoned everything to go on a canoeing trip down the Danube with Alfred Parsons and Poultney Bigelow, for a publishing house. Millet and Parsons were to have been the illustrators of the expedition, but a misunderstanding separated the canoeists early in the voyage and Millet became the author of "The Danube From the Black Forest to the Black Sea." The book contains more than 300 illustrations by Parsons and Millet.

Once the Century Club had fitted up an apartment on the upper floor of its house for a private dining room. When Millet was first shown into this room, after a glance about he said: "What a cold, bare room it is; it must be hung with a collection of drawings in black and white." At once he began writing letters to artist members and he never rested until the room was a gallery of art, as he had suggested.

No sacrifice was too great for this man to make if he thought he could thereby serve American art. Just as he was establishing himself as the foremost mural painter in America he was appointed director of the American Academy at Rome. He was delighted, but many of his friends did their best to persuade him not to take the position. They saw more personal gain and greater fame for him if he adhered to his own work.

"Give up this academy at Rome," one of them said to him. "Stick to your work here, Frank; they only want to use you, and there will be benefit in it for them, but little for you."

But it was all wasted. Millet saw an opportunity to better American art and he grasped it. He was not looking for opportunities to better himself. He would go a long way to better some one else. In Washington he and Maj. Buti lived together for a long time. They had two Japanese servants whom Millet undertook to instruct in the English language. Every morning he arose at 6 o'clock and devoted ten minutes to instructing the Japanese before breakfast. If he went away for a few days he increased the length of the lessons for a time so that the Japanese would not lose by it.

Love for His Family.

He had a wonderful love for his family, yet he was not a home man. He had more or less of the wanderlust, and one city after another called him for some special work. Always he was working to accumulate a competency for his family in the far off village of Broadway, where he hoped some day to settle down to wander no more. Of late years his visits to Broadway were not very frequent, and he sometimes lost touch with his own home affairs. It is told of him that on one occasion he was met by a young man as he alighted from the stage in front of the Lygon Arms, the inn at Broadway.

"Are you Mr. Millet?" asked the young man.

"That is my name," said the artist.

The stranger introduced himself by name.

"I am very glad to know you," said Millet, shaking the young man's hand.

"And I am glad to know you, sir," said the stranger, "for I am going to marry your daughter."

By none will Francis Millet be longer mourned than by the living members of the Title Club, who remember him as their most cheerful, interesting character. At the time of the origin of the club Millet was most famous for his work as war correspondent in the Russo-Turkish war, which was the reason for his nickname, "The Bulgarian." Each member had a shield, and Millet's bore three devices—a cross, a crescent, and a bowie knife.

Edwin Abbey, who made the mural paintings for the Boston Public Library, was known as "The Chestnut," because of a story which he told and which had no ending until his victim cried for mercy. The device on his shield was a chestnut burr. Stanford White was "The Beaver," and a picture of that animal architect was on his seal. William M. Laffan was "Polyphemus," because he had but one eye, and Arthur Quarterly was "The Marine," with a ship under full sail on his shield. Swain Gifford was "The Griffin," George Boughton was "The Puritan," Saint Gaudens was "The Saint" and Strahan, whose pen name was Earl Hin, was known as "The Bone."

Millet never forgot the friends of his youth. His old playmates were welcomed to his studio with the sons of farmers he had known in boyhood, visiting artists from abroad, statesmen, and diplomatists who counted him a friend.

At the time of his death he was at work on two commissions for public buildings, one for a library at New Bedford and the other, the drawings for which he had with him on the Titanic, for a courthouse at Wheeling, W. Va. Although he was best known in later years as a mural painter, his easel pictures have not been forgotten. In the old abbey at Broadway, which he restored in true Elizabethan style, he painted some of his most famous works, among them "Rook and Geon," "The Black Hat," and "Between Two Fires."

At the time of his death he was at work on two commissions for public buildings, one for a library at New Bedford and the other, the drawings for which he had with him on the Titanic, for a courthouse at Wheeling, W. Va. Although he was best known in later years as a mural painter, his easel pictures have not been forgotten. In the old abbey at Broadway, which he restored in true Elizabethan style, he painted some of his most famous works, among them "Rook and Geon," "The Black Hat," and "Between Two Fires."

At the time of his death he was at work on two commissions for public buildings, one for a library at New Bedford and the other, the drawings for which he had with him on the Titanic, for a courthouse at Wheeling, W. Va. Although he was best known in later years as a mural painter, his easel pictures have not been forgotten. In the old abbey at Broadway, which he restored in true Elizabethan style, he painted some of his most famous works, among them "Rook and Geon," "The Black Hat," and "Between Two Fires."

At the time of his death he was at work on two commissions for public buildings, one for a library at New Bedford and the other, the drawings for which he had with him on the Titanic, for a courthouse at Wheeling, W. Va. Although he was best known in later years as a mural painter, his easel pictures have not been forgotten. In the old abbey at Broadway, which he restored in true Elizabethan style, he painted some of his most famous works, among them "Rook and Geon," "The Black Hat," and "Between Two Fires."

At the time of his death he was at work on two commissions for public buildings, one for a library at New Bedford and the other, the drawings for which he had with him on the Titanic, for a courthouse at Wheeling, W. Va. Although he was best known in later years as a mural painter, his easel pictures have not been forgotten. In the old abbey at Broadway, which he restored in true Elizabethan style, he painted some of his most famous works, among them "Rook and Geon," "The Black Hat," and "Between Two Fires."