Account of Purley on Thames

Mortimer Menpes

R200339 24/1/2018

A composition of articles in the Project Purley Archive. R000012 was published in Purley Parish News as part of the History on My Doorstep series by John Chapman. R000013 was published by Millie Bordiss

Introduction

Have you ever wondered how Menpes Road got its name? - well it was named after Mortimer Menpes who was a very well known artist at the turn of the century. A pupil of Whistler he was born in Port Adelaide, South Australia in 1855 and died in England in 1938. His relevance for us is that he ran a fruit and carnation farm to the east of Long Lane, roughly where Apple Close, Devonshire Gardens and Warley Rise now are. His grave can be found in Pangbourne churchyard close to that of his wife.

Some relatives of Mortimer came from Australia in September 1994 to visit Purley and meet members of Project Purley. It was a pity we could not accommodate everyone as it was a most interesting evening. Joan McBride is the great-grand daughter of one of Mortimer's sisters and she was researching her family history when she learned about the Purley-Pangbourne connection. She wrote to Newbury District Council and was put onto me. I was able to show her where he lived and worked and also the houses on Long Lane which he built to house his workers.

A self portrait of Mortimer Menpes

We had a small party to swap information and invited Harold Hill from the Reading Post who knew Mortimer's daughter-in law. We were privileged to be able to borrow one of his books from Readiug Library and an enormous amount of information began to emerge. Milly Bordiss had put together a display for the recent Open Day, Jean Debney had an article from The Lady about a party for Mortimer's children and I produced copies of further material from Reading Library. Other members produced items and rich tales came from Harold Hill. Everyone was a bit surprised as to really how famous he was and the extent of his works.

He was an etcher, a painter in pastels and watercolours and, together with his daughter, Dorothy produced a number of illustrated travel books. His other daughter Maude helped him with the Menpes Press which published his paintings and he developed a novel technique for reproducing oil paintings. He used this technique to very good effect when he produced for the Government of Australia a set of copies of many of the world's masterpiece paintings.

Biography

He was born at Port Adelaide in South Australia and attended the local grammar school. In 1874 he came to London to study under Whistler whose daughter Rosemary he married a year later. He had his first exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1880. He went to Japan for 9 months to study both the art of Japan and the techniques used by Japanese artists. This visit made a great impression on him and for the rest of his life he was surrounded by souvenirs of his time in Japan. While living in Fulham his house was decorated in the Japanese style. He acquired so much material that he had to hire a freighter to get it all back to England.

In April 1888 on his return he staged an exhibition at the Dowdeswell Gallery in Bond St which caused a sensation in the London art world. Even the Prince of Wales felt obliged to see what it was all about. It was a great success and Mortimer sold all his pictures of the visit for over £2000.

His daughter Maud

During the Boer War he was War Artist to the magazine 'Black and White'. A selection of the works made then were included in his book 'War Impressions' (1901) He was a first rate rifleman and a vivid raconteur. For many years he travelled widely painting and etching wherever he went accompanied by his wife.

His daughter Maud was his partner in the Menpes Press which he founded to publish his works and his other daughter Dorothy was often employed to write the commentaries. His most famous work was probably 'The Thames' which was published in 1906 and consisted of watercolours of scenes down the Thames with commentary by G E Mitton although this was published by A&C Black.

Dorothy later married a man called Flowers and lived in a 17th Century cottage in Westwood Row, Tilehurst. and was left about 4000 of Menpes's works and books. She approached Harold Hill at the Gun St Gallery in Reading for advice on safe-keeping as she was afraid that the cottage was vulnerable to fire, which indeed it was as it later was burned to the ground. Eventually the collection was sold. Dorothy died in Minehead in July 1973 aged 89.

Mortimer developed a revolutionary new process for copying oil paintings which bore his name. He set up a company to reproduce great paintings and began issuing 'The Menpes Series of Great Masters'. He presented a set of some 50 reproductions to the Australian Government to form the basis of the Commonwealth Art Collection.

The Fruit Farm

In 1907 he bought land off Long Lane and started a Carnation and Fruit farm. He also built 8 cottages to house his foreman and other workers in his 40 glass houses. These were known for many years as Menpes Cottages and as 1-8 Long Lane, but when houses in Long Lane were numbered they became 55 to 71 Long Lane (odd nos only) with 63 missing. The foreman's house became 35 and the old office which had been converted to a cottage became 41.

For the last 30 years of his life he lived at Iris Court, Pangbourne. Rosemary died 23rd August 1936 and Mortimer followed her two years later. on 1st April 1938 Both are buried in separate graves behind Pangbourne church.

Purley Parish Council had been pressed for some years to commemorate him with a street name, especially after one was named for his contemporary, Cecil Aldin. Orchard Close which formed the

entrance to the fruit farm reflected the fruit theme as did Apple Close which was built on the main site of the farm, but it was not until 1984 that Menpes Close was named after him.

Inscriptions on graves in Pangbourne Churchyard

Grave 1

In Loving Memory of ROSEMARY the wife of MORTIMER MENPES / died August 23rd 1936

CLAUD MENPES 20th September 1963 and (inscription indecipherable)

Grave 2

MORTIMER MENPES Born in Australia 22nd Feb 1855 died 1st April 1938

Article in Purley Parish News April 1967 - anon

Mortimer Menpes was born in Australia in 1855. For the last 30 years of his life he lived at Iris Court, Pangbourne. Shortly before Word War 1 he acquired land at Purley and started a Carnation and Fruit Farm. He also built a foreman's Cottage, (now occupied by Mr Wallis and his sister Mrs D Brown) and the 8 'Menpes Cottages' to accommodate employees who were in charge of the 40 large greenhouses. This was Purley's first taste of 'Development' - a condition with which it is now familiar! the population of the village at this time was 238.

Menpes had travelled to every part of the world, and had painted and etched everywhere he went. He started the Menpes Press for reproducing his pictures, which largely appeared in books, the script being written by his daughter, Dorothy.

He was a familiar sight in Purley, visiting the nurseries in Long Lane each morning. He died in 1938 and was buried in Pangbourne churchyard.

Article by John Chapman

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Article by Millie Bordiss

I first became aware of Mortimer Menpes when I did an in depth study of Long Lane for an exhibition in Purley. I was intrigued by the man. He was a well known painter and etcher and yet here he was owning a fruit farm in Long Lane.

I went to the James Whistler exhibition at the Tate. Whistler himself was a talented etcher and painter of great renown, and it is certain that Menpes learned much from him. In the catalogue, and other books on sale, there were many references to Menpes and his association with Whistler. It is recorded that he went to Cornwall with Whistler and Sickert and subsequently to Brittany. He became a close friend of Whistler. Indeed his daughter, Dorothy Whistler Menpes was reputed to be a God-child of Whistler.

In 1995 I attended a viewing at Sotherby's prior to the auction of a private collection of prints by Menpes. I was impressed with the size of the collection and the obvious interest it generated.

In early 1998, during The Antiques Road Show recorded at Brecon, there was shown an interesting painting by Menpes. Painted in the late 1890's it was of an important Japanese actor of the day. "The Herry Irving of Japan" according to the expert. Menpes apparently gave the painting to Sir Henry Irving, and subsequently in 1905 it was auctioned at Christie's and sold for seven guineas. It had remained in the family of the purchaser since then, and brought to the show for valuation. The expert regarded Menpes as an important artist of his time, and given the quality of the work, and the subject painted, had no hesitation in giving a valuation of £12,000.

Biography by John Chapman

MORTIMER MENPES

Purley has been associated with many artists over the years and several roads in the parish have been named after them including Menpes Road on the Wimpey Estate.

Mortimer Menpes was born at Port Adelaide in South Australia and attended the local grammar school. In 1874 he came to London to study under Whistler whose daughter Rosemary he married a year later. He had his first exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1880. He went to Japan for 9 months to study both the art of Japan and the techniques used by Japanese artists. This visit made a great impression on him and for the rest of his life he was surrounded by souvenirs of his time in Japan. While living in Fulham his house was decorated in the Japanese style. He acquired so much material that he had to hire a freighter to get it all back to England.

In April 1888 on his return he staged an exhibition at the Dowdeswell Gallery in Bond St which caused a sensation in the London art world. Even the Prince of Wales felt obliged to see what it was all about. It was a great success and Mortimer sold all his pictures of the visit for over £2000.

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Dorothy later married a man called Flowers and lived in a 17th Century cottage in Westwood Row, Tilehurst. and was left about 4000 of Menpes's works and books. She approached Harold Hill at the Gun St Gallery in Reading for advice on safe-keeping as she was afraid that the cottage was vulnerable to fire, which indeed it was as it later was burned to the ground. Eventually the collection was sold. Dorothy died in Minehead in July 1973 aged 89.

Mortimer developed a revolutionary new process for copying oil paintings which bore his name. He set up a company to reproduce great paintings and began issuing 'The Menpes Series of Great Masters'. He presented a set of some 50 reproductions to the Australian Government to form the basis of the Commonwealth Art Collection; but it was many years before these were put on show as some purists in the Australian art world disapproved of showing what they regarded as fakes even though they were never claimed as originals and were as close as Australia was likely to get in seeing great art. Thankfully they are now treasured.

In 1907 he bought land off Long Lane and started a Carnation and Fruit farm. He also built 8 cottages to house his foreman and other workers in his 40 glass houses. These were known for many years as Menpes Cottages and as 1-8 Long Lane, but when houses in Long Lane were numbered they became 55 to 71 Long Lane (odd nos only) with 63 missing. The foreman's house became 35 and the old office which had been converted to a cottage became 41.

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Article in Encyclopaedia of Australian Art by A McCulloch (1969)

MENPES Mortimer

b. Port Adelaide, South Australia, 1859; d. 1938). Painter and etcher. STUDIES: School of Design, Adelaide; South Kensington, London (under Poynter).

Menpes went to London at the age of nineteen and became celebrated as an etcher. An inveterate traveller, he held more one-man exhibitions in London than any other painter of his day. Sketches of the Japanese people brought him fame in 1889. Menpes presented fifty of his copies of old masters to form the nucleus of a Commonwealth National Gallery. During the 1890s he was proud to be known as the follower and devoted admirer of WhistIer. Among his many activities was the administration of the Menpes Press, London. BIBLIOGRAPHY: Menpes, Whistler as I Knew Him (A. & C. Black, London, 1904). Fred Johns, An Australian Biographical Dictionary (Macmillan, London, 1934).

Article in Dictionary of British Artists working 1900-1950 Grant M Waters

MENPES, Mortimer L., R.I., R.B.A., R.E. (1860-1938).

Painter in oil and water-colour, etcher, of genre, portraits, landscapes and architectural subjects. Born in Australia on 22nd February 1860. Came to England and studied art under Whistler. Exhibited at the R.A. from 1880. Elected R.E. 1881 and R.I. 1897. Held many one-man shows in

London of his paintings of far-away places, including subjects from Japan, India, Mexico, Burma, France, Spain, Morocco, Egypt and Italy. His work was reproduced to illustrate books on a number of these countries. In 1900 he acted as war artist in South Africa for the Black and White. He lived for some years at Pangbourne, Berkshire, and ran his own fruit farm, also the Menpes Press. Died on 1st April 1938.

LITTLE MISS MENPES' BALL - an article in 'The Lady' of 24th Jan 1889.

MR. MORTIMER MENPES' lovely and chastely. decorated rooms in Osborne House, Munster Terrace, can never have been seen to greater advantage than on the occasion of little Miss Menpes' children's fancy dress ball last Thursday evening, all the dresses being remarkable either for accuracy or tasteful and fanciful design. First and foremost came the " Menpes Minors," the little hostess, her brother, and delightful and diminutive sister Dorothy, dressed as Japs, wearing their artistic costumes with an ease and grace "as to the manner born," quite suggesting that the habiliments of our Western world were totally unknown to them; their little faces being accurately made up, even to the elevated arched eyebrows and shaven crowns. A small figure which charmed all eyes was that of pretty little Miss Edith Unwin as "Yellow daffodil," a perfect vision of the spirit of spring, and looking as though she had just arrived from the fairyland of our youthful dreams. Mrs. Stannard's (John Strange Winter) quaint little daughter Audrey, shy as the robin redbreast on her wee left shoulder, made one quite in love with such a snowy " Winter." Minnie Terry was surely the sweetest and demurest of Puritan maidens, in her little linen cap and pointed collar; her cousin, Olive Morris making an admirable contrast as " Little Miss Muffett," in her mob-cap and delicate lace and ribbon gown, with a terribly realistic spider dangling about her. Olive Berkeley, in an exquisite pink satin " Directoire " gown, looked delicious, and gave during the evening a couple of recitations, one on the thoughts of a day-old baby being rendered with a sense of dry humour perfectly marvellous in one little more than a baby in years herself.

The youthful Noel Stoker as a "Japanese Swell," in a perfectly correct and superb costume brought from Japan, strode about with all the self-possession and staid, philosophic calm of that almond-eyed race; in fact, all the Japanese costumes worn were perfect both in design and colour. Merry, bright-eyed little Leyland Hamilton as "Charles Surface" created intense amusement by the announcement that he was unable to sit down owing to the too accurate fit of his pretty pale blue satin smalls. Randolph and Lewis Ingram as Arabs were perfect pictures ill their lovely little contrasting dresses of blue and red brought from Tangiers, their small heelless slippers being constantly found found (like Cinderella's) in the centre of the ball-room.

Mignon Harvey as a "Vivandiere" looked piquante and bright. Many tiny figures toddled about in the dances or joined in the merry games of "Hunt the Slipper" and " Round about the Mulberry Bush" amongst them being tiny, wide-eyed Claude Hardy as "Fred Archer," the most miniature of jockeys, quite a pocket edition; also little Marie Scott as " Starry Night," some of the older children towering like Gulliver in Lilliput, noticeable among them being Guy Unwin as one of the murdered Princes in the Tower; also Mrs. Jopling's son as a "Chinese Mandarin," and Miss Nellie Standage as a wonderfully well got up " Gipsy Queen."

Paul Napier looked particularly well as a " Neapolitan Fisherman," wearing his easy and picturesque costume with boyish grace. Harvey Bradbury's ·"Matador" dress was absolutely correct in every detail. Daisy Fuller looked a very pretty "Odalisque" in white and pale blue satin. Alfred Baguley made a darling "Blue Boy" accompanied by his sister, Mary, as a sweet little "Italian Peasant" But space fails me, where all were worthy of notice and admiration; so in conclusion I must mention the "Princess Poppet" of Dora Labouchere, the "Snow" of Hilda Caldicott, the "Lady Teazle" of Mabel Lewis, the "Folly" of Dorothy Hudson, the "Henry V" of Bobby Mason, Diana

Creyke's " Empire," the "Cinderella" of Kitty Mason, Grace Fennet's " Winter," Kenneth Wilson's Mephistopheles," Stella Johnson's "Yum Yum," with others too numerous to mention, as all distinguished by the grace and ease with which they wore their pretty costumes.

The ball concluded with a distribution of Japanese presents and toys.

Berkshire Biography - Mortimer Menpes published in Daily Telegraph 31/7/73

It would appear that, whatever his successes while alive - and these were considerable - former Pangbourne artist Mortimer Menpes may well achieve long after death in 1938, yet another peak of popularity. Perhaps many more thereafter.

For his kind of work is exactly what is best-suited to the modern home, especially in this day and age when so many people are beginning to discover not only that they are able to afford good homes, they are in a financial position to furnish these attractively in the best of taste. Which includes, of course, good art.

The Kincrest Galleries, in Valpy Street, Reading, have now on exhibition a most eloquent collection of his works - etchings both black-and-white and coloured, small oils, crayon-and-wash and gouache studies.

For such quality - and it is exceptional-prices are surprisingly moderate yet pictures by Menpes could grace any wall without apology.

It is for his etchings that he is best noted, and in the Galleries these predominate, artistically and in number. they emphasise how superlatively well Menpes captured light; his clear-cut, economical treatment causes aspects to leap out of scenes which other artists might leave dull. Even in the gloom of a hushed cathedral he extracts a glow; river dusk with barges gliding retains a delightful luminosity: a country cottage smiles in the moonlight.

Sparkling fresh are his gouache and crayon-and-wash studies-only the abstract-mad could ignore the appeal of these warm, human impressions. An old lady bent over her book, a child absorbed in play . . . these are gems among many.

The tiny oils depicting mostly native children contain so very much richness in such small space; just one would " make " a room.

Menpes was a war-artist in the Boer War. And here we have the portrait of Lord Roberts, uniformed and in tent bent over a dispatch; also that of Cecil Rhodes.-L.N.

Obituary in Daily Telegraph - 31/7/73

DOROTHY FLOWER

A link with many famous painters and etchers of the Ewardian and Victorian ages has been broken by the death of Mrs Dorothy Whistler Flower at Minehead, Somerset, aged 89.

She was the second daughter of Mortimer Menpes, an artist and etcher, and one-time pupil of Whistler;

Mrs Flower, who was Whistler's godchild, wrote the letterpress for her father's world renowned illustrated books, the first to be produced under the three-colour process in this country.

They were published by 'Adam and Charles Black, and included " War Impressions, " from her father's experiences ' as a journalist during the Boer War "Japan," "The World's Children," and " Venice."

She knew the famous Breton School of Artists at Pont-Aven which included Gaugin. He made her a pair of sabots in poker work. and she left several pictures specially produced for her by many

artists of the school.

The Sensation of London's art world - an article in the Berkshire Mercury by Leslie North 5/5/1977

THE name leapt at me, from a coverless scrapbook in a Reading antique shop; "Mortimer Menpes, the painter.' A few years ago I inspected locally a one-man exhibition of the dead artist's works, and judged the standard exceptional, wondering why others did not admire as I did and snap up some of these pictures (mostly etchings, if I remember) which must certainly prove first-rate buys.

What happened to that collection I do not know, apparently it was loaned by a relative. Mr. Menpes, who died in April, 1938 at Iris Court, Pangbourne, was joint founder - with daughter Maud of the Menpes Press of London and Watford, the Menpes Series of Great Masters (he perfected a process of reproducing oil-paintings, all under personal supervision), and the Menpes Fruit Farm, Ltd. - including the Carnation Nurseries at Purley near Reading. The last was established in 1907.

Life in Japan

Menpes was born at Port Adelaide, S. Australia, in 1859. The scrapbook is dated 1888. Art training proper began at South Kensington 10 years before. For, nine months he studied in Japan both the life and the art of the people; then in April, 1888, at the Dowdeswell Galleries in London's Bond Street, showed the artistic results of that visit - paintings and etchings, hung in a room with walls draped in pale heliotrope satin, the frames of these small fan-suggestive offerings in varied shades of gold. Everything intended to reproduce the true atmosphere of Japan. Even a girl in full Japanese dress....

" It is a long time since London has seen anything so genuinely beautiful . . " wrote one critic. " The show must be pronounced an unqualified success. All London was there on Saturday, the crowd of lovely women and stalwart men who jostled each other to get a glimpse at the pictures must have felt, for once, that the heat and bustle of a private view had other compensations than the old one of staring at each other."

Among those distinguished guests (all wearing sprays of orange-blossom) were Mr. Forbes Robertson, Miss Du Maurier, Mr. Oscar Wilde with wife, poet Robert Browning and famous artist Whistler under whom Menpes was said to have studied.

Mrs. Menpes was there; she, "a very pretty ·woman" married when he was only 20, they had four children at the time of the exhibition, their home was at Fulham. Actress Ellen Terry was rehearsing but promised to visit on the Monday. The Prince of Wales came much later.

"These paintings, drawings and etchings admirably represent a careful and loving study of this picturesque people, their quaint garments, and their most delightful colouring" praised "Art." Menpes was quoted as saying that if he succeeded in bringing Japan and its art nearer to anybody, he would have fulfilled his desire. Declaring that that consummation had indeed been achieved, in this "most interesting affair of the season," the journal's critic commented: "We almost feel as though we had ourselves been travelling to Japan.... "

Hero

Mortimer Menpes was " the hero of the hour. This very clever and audacious young artist . . . has hit upon a brilliant idea, that of journeying to Japan and studying at the fountain-head the source of all our modern art culture.... Being a Whistlerian, he is nothing if not eccentric.... " Well, he quickly sold all his pictures, for a total of more than £2,000.

Though Mr Whistler was "radiant and congratulatory upon the great success of his most able disciple," there soon arose trouble. Whistler, president of the Royal Society of British Artists, had his works spurned by that society - Menpes was said to have resigned membership in sympathy. It seems, however, that about that time Menpes offended the older man by a remark concerning his

treasured white lock of hair, and they ceased friendship. Critics had been saying that Menpes had out-shone his former master....

Pioneer

An article by Menpes kept in the scrapbook claims himself to have been the first English artist to visit Japan "for the sole purpose of studying all the methods of Japanese art, and of learning all the lessons possible from it and from the Japanese artists. I was resolved to get to the very heart of Japanese life . . . the most intensely artistic country in the world." He was privileged to come in contact with some of the best painters in Japan, including Kyôsai, one of the greatest Japanese painters of the day.

He found that Japanese artists and craftsmen were surprised that the English and Americans wanted "such ugly things." In Japan, they would not have such in their homes

Menpes' Fulham house was decorated and furnished much after the true Japanese outlook; his treasures included an invitation by the Mikado to a party).

The artist was a crack rifleshot. One interview-cutting in the scrapbook states he had shot for Middlesex at Wimbledon, later in the English Twenty at the International and won numerous prizes "of great value." Menpes was a lively raconteur.

" Who Was Who " has a lively reference to him that he surely must have written. This Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (elected RE, RBA and RE, exhibiting at the Royal Academy for 20 years from 1880) was " inartistically " born in Australia. And educated "nominally at a grammar school in Port Adelaide but really in a life scheme of his own. His career as a painter began when he was one year old; he is still a painter...."

Restless

That he had held more one-man exhibitions in London than any other living painter, is another claim, and these reflecting his restless travels throughout the world; also his experiences as war-artist from 1900 in South Africa for "Black and White" Books by him included his " War Impressions," first of a series of books in colour from his sketches "with, in most cases, text written by his daughter Dorothy Menpes." "Whistler As I Knew Him" (Menpes denied he was ever that artist's pupil), "Henry Irving," "Lord Kitchener," "Lord Roberts," "Japan World's Children,"- "India-Brittany" were other works. At Reading Borough Reference Library I saw a most attractive book on the Thames written by G. E. Mitten with no fewer than 75 delightful line-and-wash drawings by Menpes that are tingling with atmosphere. The best, those cool in mood towards the river's mouth, hay-barges near Westminster Bridge and the power-station near Battersea Bridge particularly fine examples. His signature had become long, narrow and linked, written in full. "In the preparation of world pictures he did the world in record time, being unsurpassed even by Jules Verne," states "Who Was Who." And, curiously, rounded off life at a fruit farm....

Article by Harold Hill in the Reading Evening Post 17/2/88

MY article this week is very nostalgic.

It is about an artist of whom I know a great deal, and I am sure that when I mention the name Menpes it will bring back a lot of memories for our older readers.

Mortimer Menpes (1860 to 1938) was, in my opinion, one of the very finest etchers and engravers.

He was born in Australia and travelled very widely, not only painting the countries he visited but also writing about them.

His favourite country was Japan, and it was the stories of Mrs Menpes (who I believe was a

sister-in-law to Mortimer) that used to keep me enthralled for many an hour at her 17th century cottage in Westwood Row at Tilehurst; now sadly no longer there.

She travelled the world with Mortimer and would tell me how he came to write and illustrate various books about his voyages.

He eventually settled in Pangbourne where he had the Menpes Fruit Farm and his own printing press.

A fantastic etcher and engraver working in very fine detail he was trained by Whistler and eventually shared a flat with him at Cheyne Walk on the Embankment in London.

This is why I have chosen these two views which Mortimer did of the Pool of London.

One very interesting and important point I have to make is about the increase in the value of this artist's works.

Thirty years ago small copper plate etchings like the two here-just 10ins by 8ins - were worth (even if signed by Menpes) about £1 each.

Now, however, the value of such etchings as these has risen to between £25 and £60 and this is backed up by the official price guide just published.

Article in 'Who Was Who' 1929-1940

MENPES, Mortimer F.R.G.S. painter, etcher, raconteur and rifle-shot; inartistically born in Australia; war artist for Black and White in South Africa, 1900. Educ: nominally at a grammer school in Port Adelaide, but really on a life scheme of his own;. His career as a painter began when he was one year old; he is still a painter. He has held more one-man exhibitions in London than any other living painter: viz. Japan, India Mexico, Burmah, Cashmere, France, Spain, Morocco, Egypt, Venice, Beautiful Women, Beautiful Children, the War In South Africa, Venice, exhibitions of Black and White, and of Etchings in colour, thereby reviving a lost art. Publications: a whole series of etchings at different periods; Essays (one called 'The Actualist' a skit on the Impressionists), War Impressions, l901; Japan, 190l - World Pictures, 1902; World's Children, 1908, The Durbar, 1908 · Venice, 1904; Whistler as I knew Him, 1904; Brittany, 1905; Rembrandt, 1906 · India, 1905; Thames, 1906; Sir Henry Irving 1906 · Portrait Biographies, Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener. In the preparation of World Pictures he did the world in record time, being unsurpassed even by Jules Verne; Joint founder, with his daughter Maud, of the Menpes Press, The Menpes Series of Great Masters which; were reproduced under his personal supervision, and the Menpes Fruit Farm Ltd including the Carnation Nurseries, Purley, near Reading. Recreations rifle-shooting, travelling. Address: Iris Court, Pangbourne Berks. T: Pangbourne 94 (Died 1 April 1938)

Article by Harold Hill in The Reading Evening Post 15/11/89

In the past six years of writing for the Post on the history and value of paintings and works of art, this is the first time it has been my pleasure to write about a painting of which I personally know the close details of the subject and the owner.

Many of you will recognise this charming old thatched cottage which until a very few years ago stood in about two acres of land at Westwood Row, Tilehurst.

It has revived some fine memories I have of very happy hours which I spent both in and out of this wonderful 17th century cottage. I cannot remember ever going there without feeling at complete peace once I set foot inside the building.

Mystery

A house of history and mystery, it was a warren, with a maze of rooms and corridors. Its owner was a fine elderly lady who was also full of mystery and stories of her life of 80 years-not only about

herself, but about her father Mortimer Menpes, who I had the pleasure of writing about two years ago when a reader brought along a series of his etchings.

Just as a little reminder, Mortimer Menpes was an etcher and engraver of the latter half of the 19th century

He shared a studio with Whistler at Cheyne Walk in London which of course, was the home and studios of a lot of the pre-Raphaelite artists at that time. A great traveller of the world, he especially spent a lot of time in China - a land which he loved.

Back in the early 1960's I used to spend hours with old Mrs Menpes who would keep me enthralled with tales of the travels of Mortimer throughout the world.

Let me tell you more about the house with its fine old thatched roof; and inside, the huge timber beams which supported it all. You can see these fine beams on the outside as well. The main chimney was so huge at the base that I could stand upright in it and as Mrs Menpes and I used to sit and chat we would gaze into this large log fire.

It was always a fear of hers that the place would one day burn down, which of course it eventually did and with it went some fine history of Reading.

She had, as you can see, a lovely garden which was always kept so nice and in the orchards at the rear of the house stood an old Romany gypsy caravan which was her studio where she used to sit and paint-as did Mortimer Menpes in the early part of this century.

Mrs Menpes would tell me tales of a lot of famous actors and actresses they knew and people like Rossetti, Millias, Vesta Tilley Zena Dare, George Roby and so many more. The list was endless and yet thrilling to listen to.

Of course Mortimer Menpes was not only a fine artist, he also wrote over 40 books about his travels around the world, especially China.

I remember there was one very very rare screen they had there which he brought back from China, very large, all inlaid with Mother of Pearl and on todays market, as a one off especially made for them, it would have been worth thousands of pounds.

In fact Mortimer brought back so much from the far East that when he came back he hired a special cargo boat to bring it back here and to his London studio.

If space permitted, I could tell a whole page about this famous man. He was also a great friend of Sir Muirhead Bone, who I also knew and with whom I had private lessons in art at his studio in Oxford.

The painting you see here was painted especially for the Menpes by an artist who I can find little about named F. Vingoe in 1902.

Indebted

At that time they also had the Menpes fruit farm at Pangbourne and the Menpes printing press where Mortimer did all his copper plate printing of his drawings and paintings.

I am indebted to the owners of this fine and detailed painting who I know also knew the Menpeses very well and my sincere thanks to them for the loan of it.

Extracts from 'Whistler, as I Knew Him' by Mortimer Menpes

These extracts written by Menpes himself tell of his early life in London as a pupil of Whistler and his relationship with him. However they tell us a lot about Menpes' own character. (from Whistler the Exaggerated, pp xxiii and xxiv)

Often I was with Whistler at the moment when he thought of a brilliant phrase. We might be in a hansom cab or at a Soho restaurant, and he would say, after telling the then latest quips, "Now, who shall I tack it on to, Menpes?" If an opportunity did not occur, he very soon made one by writing a letter which called for answer. All his friends at that period delighted in this curious twist in his character. None of us for a moment thought of taking him seriously. He attacked me over and over again by letter; but I did not resent it. I had never harmed Whistler, in fact, I always looked upon it as a privilege to help him in any way I could; yet he wrote to me letters full of stinging wit and sarcasm, letters in which he called me the " Kangaroo of his country, born with a pocket and putting everything into it." But Whistler forgave me afterwards. The moment he met me again he began to roar with laughter, and treated the whole affair as a huge joke. I too, treated it as a joke. I knew that "the Kangaroo " was too good a simile to be missed by Whistler, and I appreciated his wit. He fired off his sallies on me; and that was all right, I understood. Now his friends, in taking such statements seriously, are perpetuating real harm, such as Whistler himself never for a moment intended. He called me "the robber," and declared that I had stolen his paint, suggested list slippers and a dark lantern, and was altogether very amusing, because I happened to distemper a room lemon yellow.

I had the privilege of being with Whistler for some years, and I trust that I learned many things from him: certainly, if I did not, the omission is deplorable. Whistler did not mean to hurt me - he was really very fond of me. For his friends to take this literally, and imagine that Whistler was the originator of distemper and the colour of lemon yellow, and that I was in truth a robber, is absurd: it is casting ridicule on the Master.

(From 'In the Days Round' pp 3-11)

Those days which I spent with Whistler were fascinating beyond words, and at the same time a superb education for me. I will endeavour to give a description of a typical day with the Master.

Invariably every morning by the first post I received a letter, and the letter nearly always said "Come at once important." I have dozens of such epistles in my possession now. I would-call at his house at about nine o'clock, and we would walk round together to his studio. There the first and foremost duty to be attended to was Whistler's correspondence. No man had more letters calculated to arouse and excite than Whistler. The reading of them always involved quite an hour's conversation during which time elaborate plans for the scalping of such-and-such a man were laid out. Then Whistler would get his little pochade box, and together we would drift out into the open, on to the Embankment, or down a side street in Chelsea, - and he would make a little sketch, sometimes in water, sometimes in oil colour. It might be a fish shop with eels for sale at so much a plate, and a few soiled children in the foreground; or perhaps a sweet-stuff shop, and the children standing with their faces glued to the pane. There we would stay and paint until luncheon time, sitting on rush-bottomed chairs borrowed from the nearest shop. Wherever Whistler went he caused interest and excitement: men, women, and children flocked about him-especially children, Chelsea children, shoals of them. If one of them appealed to Whistler from the decorative standpoint, he would say, "Not bad, Menpes, eh? " This was, perhaps, a very soiled and grubby little person indeed. But Whistler would take her kindly by the hand and ask her where she lived; and the three of us would trot along to ask the mother if she might sit, the child, with its upturned flower-like though dirty face, gazing with perfect confidence at Whistler. And the Master would talk to the gutter-snipe in a charmingly intimate way about his work and aspirations. "Now we are going to do great things together," he would say, and the little dirty-faced child, blinking up at him, seemed almost to understand. For Whistler never failed with children: no one understood them quite like the Master, and no one depicted child-life better than he. Whistler's children were never little old ladies: they were real children, with all the grace and ingenuousness of childhood apparent in every line. Then would come the tussle with the mother, who, naturally enough, wanted to clean up her child, and with the Master, who insisted that she should come just as she was, dirt and all. Eventually we would go back to the studio, where,

perhaps, the little one would help to set the table for luncheon, settling down at once to full responsibility.

Whistler was in some ways very helpless; but he always cooked our luncheon. A great deal of time would be spent over this work, for the Master was very exact and dainty in everything he undertook. There was the breaking of the eggs into the pan and the careful manipulation of an omelette. I would be despatched for a bottle of white wine, and Whistler himself would drink milk with biscuits - soaked in it - he always lived on very slender fare. Then the child would sit, and Whistler would paint, - sometimes a life-sized oil-colour, sometimes a little pastel. But from the moment his brush touched the canvas the child as a child was forgotten: she might droop and faint before Whistler would come down to earth again and understand that this was a living mortal. Sometimes after a long afternoon the girl began to bellow, something was hurting her, or she was stiff with standing so long,- and Whistler, looking up with a start, would say, " Pshaw! What's it all about? Can't you give it something Menpes? Can't you buy it something ? " The child eventually left the studio laden with toys, and perfectly happy once more.

How well I remember that studio in Walham Green! It was an enormous room filled with great canvases, scores of them, some begun and others ready to paint on with ivory black and white. Carefully placed on easels round the room were a few finished pictures, and, in a position where the light fell upon it, a large table which Whistler used as a palette. This table was always kept scrupulously clean. Everything about Whistler was dainty. He himself at work in his studio was always dressed in such a way that at any moment he was ready to receive visitors. There was no smock frock, no velvet coat, no tucking up of the sleeve: he was dressed in his studio as he would be in a drawing-room.

The child sitter having left, Whistler and I would go round to Bond Street, to the tailor. Curiously enough, whenever one came in contact with Whistler one entirely forgot one's own affairs, and became completely] occupied with his. The fit of the Master's coat was far more important to me at that time than my own artistic work. At the tailor's, Whistler would give an elaborate description of how a certain coat was to be made, and the discussion generally ended in a violent attack on the tailor. Whistler would explain how the garment was to be made, and the tailor would carry out his directions literally; but no sooner had the man accomplished the work than Whistler would say: " This is all wrong ! How dare you say that it is what I told you to do? I am a painter. It is not my business to make coats That is your province. Therefore, you should have led me to do what you knew to be right." Eventually the mistake would be remedied, and Whistler, putting on the coat once more, walked up and down before the glass, noticing carefully whether the tails fell in graceful lines toward his heels. Sometimes for a quarter of an hour he would stride thus before the mirror, - hand on hip, his cane balanced between his fingers, and his hat cocked well over one eye. In the end, if he happened to be well pleased, he would tap the tailor with his cane, - that showed great appreciation, and the poor man was almost overwhelmed. Then, in a half-jocular way, Whistler would say, "You know, you must not let the Master appear badly clothed: it is your duty to see that I am well dressed." All who entered that tailor's shop while the fitting was in progress, no matter how pressing their business, became highly interested in Whistler and his coat. An old soldier came in puffing and blowing, impatient at being kept waiting Whistler, delighted to get an audience, buttonholed the veteran immediately, and said: "Now, just look at this coat ! Look at the back of it! What are we to do?" And by and by the warrior became thoroughly interested in the fit of the Master's coat, quite forgetting his own affairs. When everything had been arranged to his satisfaction, and both tailor and customers were reduced to a condition of collapse Whistler gathered up his skirts and stepped out into Bond Street.

We would go the round of the different galleries Whistler never talked much to the dealers. Sometimes he would enter a gallery, and say, "Ha, ha! amazing ! " and then sail out. afterwards he

would turn to me, and say, "You know, that does a lot of good: it's like the important bank manager who visits each department every morning and coughs loudly to show his authority."

Sometimes we visited a dealer who owed him money, and Whistler would receive a cheque. Once the cheque was not handed to him in what he thought a sufficiently dignified manner, and he said to the dealer: "This is careless of you. You push this cheque toward me, and you do not realise what a privilege it is to be able to hand it to the Master. You should offer it on a rich old English salver and in a kingly way."Once a dealer borrowed a gorgeously embossed silver salver for the occasion, and when the Master arrived for his cheque - he was very punctual - presented it on the salver with a carefully worded and elegant little speech that had taken some pains to rehearse. The Master was pleased. "This," said he, "is as it should be"

Often in Bond Street we encountered a critic, and it was amusing sometimes to watch the unfortunate man trying to wriggle out of Whistler's reach. Never did mortal man create more excitement during a simple afternoon's stroll than Whistler. Sometimes we would drift from Bond Street to Chelsea, and suddenly finding a subject, he would etch a little (I always carried a packet of copperplates carefully grounded and ready for Whistler's use.) Then, perhaps in the middle of our work, he would rush off to a garden party. It often annoyed me that Whistler should be wasting his time with foolish, ignorant people, who neither understood nor appreciated his worth.

In the evening we dined at the Arts Club, or at a friend's house, for at that time Whistler's friends were my friends, and he always liked to have me with him. Sometimes, but not often, we went to the theatre. Whistler was terribly disturbing: he never would listen to serious plays in a sober spirit. Tragedy convulsed him. It was false and wrong, he said and the actors made obvious mistakes: to him such plays were ludicrous from start to finish. I shall never forget going one night with Whistler and Godwin the artist to see Wilson Barrett as Claudian. Whistler screamed and laughed and rocked himself to and fro in an agony of merriment. Godwin was a very brilliant man, and a serious sort of fellow; but he couldn't look at the stage, the actors, or anything else, for watching Whistler. I thought he would have had a fit ! Shakspearian plays appealed to Whistler as being exquisitely funny. The poses of the actors, he said, were antagonistic to the period, and he never could understand why the men wore gold boots. Still, no one could be more enthusiastic and stimulating as an audience than Whistler when he chose. For example, Nellie Farren he thought splendid. "Amazing ! marvellous !" he would cry every time the curtain fell. Comic songs at the music halls and pantomimes amused him just as if he were a child.

Always, after a theatre, we went to the Hogarth Club, where Whistler gathered all the men about him by the fascination of his talk. Speaking simply in a quiet way to myself, and without once looking round, Whistler would draw every man in that club to his side, smart young men about town, old fogies, retired soldiers who had been dozing in arm-chairs The Master himself appeared unconscious: I alone knew that he had wilfully attracted them. He hypnotised those men, every one of them; and it was interesting to watch that slight, fragile little figure sipping his glass of liqueur and holding the attention of that room full of men all drinking unlimited brandies and sodas. Every one of them, I warrant went away at the end of the evening with a desire for work: Whistler invariably inspired people to work.

He and I would go home together. We always walked, however late the hour, for the Master looked upon walking as a healthy exercise. It was strange to see him, in his dainty shoes, holding up his skirts as he picked his way through the mud of Piccadilly, always laughing, always gay, never weary. We invariably went home at night by the way of the Embankment, to look at some nocturne, perhaps a fish shop, which Whistler was trying to commit to memory. He would talk aloud as he created the idea for one of his marvellous pictures. He would say: "Look at that golden interior with the two spots of light, and that old woman with the chequered shawl. See the warm purple tone outside going away up to the green of the sky, and the shadows from the windows thrown on the

ground. What an exquisite lace work they form! " He would say all this aloud, and I would walk back with him to his studio, and talk with him, sometimes, until two o'clock in the morning. Then he would say, as I was leaving: "Now, Menpes, remember, I want you to be here early in the morning. As for me, I am going to make my mind a blank until I paint that fish shop; and you must be here early."

And I always was there early,- so early that very often I breakfasted with Whistler,- but, at whatever hour I arrived, I always found him up, and dressed sparkling and bright as ever.

From Master and Followers pp 16-19

Gathered in my house in Fulham, we made red dots on the map of London to localise our homes. This was for the purpose of deciding on a central spot for the studio. Eventually we decided on Baker Street, and rented a little room there at six shillings a week. We had a difficulty at first in collecting the shillings; but it was divided among seven of us, and when one didn't pay up the others did.

It was the hiring of the room that gave us an opportunity for putting into practice ideas on the subject of house decoration, which we felt to be of the utmost importance, in fact, a principal part of the mission. We were convinced that the prevailing system of house decoration was against the laws of art, and we were determined that our school should feel its way to a scheme that would revolutionise the system. "Be broad," was one of our favourite axioms; "Be simple," was another. We had a great many pet phrases: indeed, after a time we developed quite an art language of our own. "Nature never makes a mistake in matching her tones," we said; and we settled that we would go and match tones from nature for the decorative plan of our club room

For personal as well as for artistic reasons we wished to demonstrate that the highest decorative art is not necessarily expensive, and decided that our plan should be carried out in distemper. Distemper is cheap. Distemper is "broad and simple" Distemper is the best medium for putting on a wall and in colour, we felt, lay our strength. Thereupon we proposed to take for our model the broad, simple decorative scheme of the universe. Roughly speaking, our harmony should be that of sea and sky

The club room was small, and we had realised that to cut it up in patches of decoration would be inartistic. We decided to distemper the walls blue, the colour of the sky, and the ceiling green, the colour of the sea. We did not at that time discover that the scheme was upside down; but then we had a theory that nature was just as beautiful either way. What did it matter? Any woodwork about was. painted the tone of the Dover cliffs, in sympathy with the sea-scape.

There was no fireplace in the room if there had been we couldn't have afforded coal: so we bought a paraffin stove, and in winter evenings we used to warm ourselves at its flame. Poor little stove! I always fancied there was something pathetic in the way we edged round it while we discussed art,the friendly surreptitious rivalry between boots and knees as to which should get nearest the flame.

We wrote on special note-paper, of a peculiar tint, sacred to the school; and, like the Master, had a special stamp. The design was, we thought, symbolic as well as decorative. It represented a steam-engine advancing, with a red light displayed - a danger signal to the Philistines to warn them that reformers were on their track.

We were very enthusiastic at that period, and that, of course, led us into absurdities. Still, no doubt, enthusiasm did us a world of good; after all, it is a law of progress to march through mistakes to achievement. It was the peculiarity of the school that they were always on the verge of some great discovery in the matter of method, or of pigment, or of manipulation, touching, as it were, some hitherto unknown truth, which was to revolutionise all the old canons of art. If you met one of us round a street corner, he would be excited and mysterious. "Ah, my dear fellow," he would exclaim, "I have something to tell you. I'm reducing nature to a system. I'm getting things to a state of absolute perfection. Just wait !"

We always waited; but nothing seemed to happen. That is, a great deal came, but nothing in the least approaching perfection. In fact, what generally did come was failure. We were not disheartened. We never lost our enthusiasm. Balked in one direction, we would bravely start off in another. If we hadn't been so earnest, there might have been something absurd in this blind chase after the ideal, a chase through poor, mean places where no ideal could possibly be found. To me the pathos of our misguided energy, the even tragedy of our hopelessly clogged aspirations, lifted our school far beyond the realms of the ludicrous.

At one time we were influenced by the work of another artist, Digars; but, of course, this was kept from the Master. It was Walter Sickert who first saw Digars's work. He brought enthusiastic descriptions of the ballet girls Digars was painting in Paris. We tried to combine the methods of Whistler and Digars and the result was low-toned ballet girls.

There was another period when we used to travel all round London painting nature from the top of hansom cabs. It was lucky for us that Whistler never saw us. The ignominy of being sent home to bed would have been too terrible.

Once an interesting figure appeared on our horizon - a French painter. He was Whistler's find, and was held up to us Followers as an example. "At last" Whistler said, "I have found a follower worthy of the Master." (I noticed with secret joy that he did not call him pupil.) This man went bareheaded always when in the presence of Whistler: whether out of doors or in, no one could persuade him to wear a hat

pages 23-25

In fact as artists we owed our existence entirely to the Master. We were allowed the intimacy of his studio we watched him paint day after day; we studied his methods, witnessed his failures and successes. He never placed us down as pupils and told us to paint such-and-such an object, nor did he ever see our work when it was finished; but we felt his influence, nevertheless, and strongly. We were true Followers; and in the first stage of our enthusiasm we had such a reverence for the Master that, highly as we esteemed Velasquez and Rembrandt, we still looked upon these persons as mere drivellers in art compared with him. Strange, eager amateurs we would recognise sometimes, but only because they painted on the Whistler lines. One lady, I remember, used to paint flowers We thought her work very fine. She had no academic training; but we placed her high because she painted on grey panels and in sympathy with Whistler. He of course, we placed far above Raphael. In fact, we couldn't stand Raphael, because Whistler had said that he was the smart young man of his period.

One rainy day Whistler was sitting in my dining room poring over a large volume of Raphael's cartoons. after spending two hours with them, he came to the conclusion that Raphael did not count. But he was pleased, he said, to have had the opportunity of placing the smart young man of his day. Rembrandt we recognised to a certain extent, because Whistler had been heard to say that he had had his good days. also, however, he had remarked that Rembrandt revelled in gummy pigment and treacly tones: so Rembrandt, in our opinion, did not occupy much of a position. Canaletto and Velasquez we placed high, very high, but not, of course, on the same plane with Whistler. The only master with whom we could compare our own was Hokusai, the Japanese painter.

At that time we copied Whistler in every detail. If he painted from a table instead of using a palette, from that moment onward we discarded the use of palettes. Whistler talked of breadth and simplicity, and broader and emptier sketches than the Followers produced you could not possibly imagine. At that period I was painting little children on the sands - some clad only in sunbonnets, and others without the bonnets. I began to paint so broadly and so simply that the flesh tone of the child and the sand were so much alike that the picture, when it was finished resembled a clean sheet of paper.

Then, in company with the other Followers, I acquired the "grey-panel" craze. Personally, I have ever seen nature in grey tones, but often in vivid, almost prismatic, colours; and the feeble little pictures I produced, stained grey panels in Whistlerian frames, were almost pathetic in their futility.

We Followers saw things from Whistler's standpoint. If we etched a plate, we had to etch it almost exactly on Whistlerian lines. If Whistler kept his plates fair, ours were so fair that they could scarcely be seen. If Whistler adopted economy of means, using the fewest possible lines, we became so nervous that we could scarcely touch the plate lest we should overelaborate.

Of course, there were moments when we rebelled from the Master's influence and tried to be bold 'The whole principle of art," we said, "is that you must be bold: you must be careless, indifferent, reckless." There was no such thing as technique. It did not matter what you used brush, charcoal, drypoint - you must be bold. We tore ourselves away from breadth and simplicity, staining panels and economising means, and we tried to be bold.

The Man pp 39-45

I committed the unpardonable offence of going to Japan. Japan should have been saved for the Master. I must admit that I really did slip off like a naughty boy sneaking out of school. I felt that he would resent my leaving him. I remember quite well writing a note to Whistler on my way to the station, and leaving it at a little tobacconist shop in the King's Road, not far from his home, which I begged the man there not to deliver until some hours afterward. All the way to Paddington, as I journeyed onward, I blamed myself bitterly for having left the Master. I felt that I was doing a wrong thing in leaving at that his greatest period, when he needed all his friends about him. Still, I too had a career to make, and was determined to succeed. Whistler, when I left England, was much occupied with me. He wrote a series of letters - pin-pricks every one of them - which reached me in Japan, and even in their journey out they had lost none of their power to sting. I longed then to go back and fill my old position again by Whistler's side as trusted friend. I yearned for the old days when I lived in the intimacy of his studio and we worked together and almost thought together. Many a time, unable to bear up any longer, I was on the point of taking the next steamer home. I felt myself to be an outcast, exiled and alone. One or the other, however,

had to be sacrificed, either Whistler's friendship or my own career, and in the struggle friendship went to the wall.

When I returned to London, I met Whistler at the Hogarth Club, surrounded by feeble followers. Sad little people they were, aping the Master to the verge of pathos - small editions of Whistler without backbone. When he saw me he laughed his marvellous laugh, and said, "Ha, ha! amazing!" All round the room one heard faint echoes, "Ha, ha ! amazing!" "Well, sir," he said, "excuse yourself." I found it difficult, for I earnestly felt that from his standpoint there really was no excuse for my conduct. I could discover nothing with which I could plead extenuating circumstances. At the same time, filled with remorse and shame though I was, I could not resist telling him that I had met, in Japan, another master. "What !" screamed Whistler. "How dare you call this Japanese a master on your own responsibility? Give me your reasons. What do you mean by it?"

Then and there, in the Hogarth Club before Whistler and his followers, I began to explain Kyôsai's method of painting. So engrossed did I become in my topic that I talked on and on far into the night, forgetting all antagonism, forgetting everything, except that I was a student, and was describing to one master the methods of another. I explained that every touch Kyôsai placed upon his stretched silk was perfectly balanced and well placed, and that therefore, if the picture were arrested at any moment during its career it would form a perfect whole, every line balancing the other. "That is my method," interrupted Whistler in a protesting, impatient voice. "No" I answered gently: "that is the method of Kyôsai"

I continued my narrative. I explained that, after having made his drawing, Kyôsai proceeded to

paint his picture. I described how that he began when painting a figure by mixing his different tones in little blue pots, such as flesh tone, drapery tone, tones for the hair, gold-ornament tone, and that there was no searching for tones as on the average palette. There was no accident: all was sure, a scientific certainty from beginning to end. I told him that Kyôsai displayed enormous facility and great knowledge. A black dress would be one beautiful broad tone of black, the flesh one clear tone of flesh, the shadows growing out of the mass forming a part of the whole. "That is my method." Whistler broke in volubly: " that is exactly my method. I don't paint shadows in little blues, and greens, and yellows until they cease to be a part of the picture. I paint them exactly as they are in nature, as a part of the whole. This Kyôsai must be a wonderful man, for his methods are my methods. Go on, Menpes: tell me more!"

I then told him that when a Japanese artist was drawing a bird he began with the point of interest which, let us say, was the eye. The brilliant black eye of a crow fixed upon a piece of meat attracted his attention; he remembered it, and the first few strokes he portrayed upon his stretched silk would be the eye of the bird. The neck, the legs, the body - everything radiated and sprang from that bright eye, just as it would in the animal itself. Whistler was quiet after this last description quite quiet, and very thoughtful. He forgot his anger against me for going to Japan, forgot everything, save his intense interest and desire to hear more of the Japanese painter who also was a master. The feeble followers he dismissed.

Treating me as a friend and pupil once more, Whistler took me by the arm, and we walked home together to the "Vale." We sat up talking until the small hours of the morning; or rather I talked, for once, and Whistler sat drinking in every word. I described Kyôsai's methods in detail, even to the mixing of his pigment and the preparing of his silk panels, for Whistler in some ways was a faddist and revelled in detail. When he was bidding me good-by on the doorstep, Whistler's last words were, "These Japanese are marvellous people, and this man Kyôsai must be a very great painter; but, - do you know ? - his methods and mine are absolutely similar!"

Whistler's real quarrel with me came a little while afterwards. A day or two before my exhibition of Japanese pictures opened, he appeared in the gallery looking very cross and carrying in his hand an open copy of The Pall Mall Gazette. I happened to be talking to a friend, and did not notice his entrance; but I was told afterwards that his face wore a set, determined expression which to those who knew him predicted one of his historical scenes. However, he refrained from chastising me. There was only his frail bamboo cane for weapon, and it did not seem quite the moment. Still, he had lashed himself into a fury; for he literally foamed at the mouth, and there was a slight fleck of foam upon the black ribbon of his necktie. I remember feeling ashamed of myself and unworthy as I saw that tie. What right had I, I asked myself, to arrest this great man in his work, to check masterpieces, to cause him to occupy and worry himself for one moment with my small affairs, and pour his wrath upon me, no matter how unmerited it might be? The Master flew up to me, and began without waiting for explanations. "You have inspired this article in The Pall Mall Gazette. It is written by Mr. Spielmann; but it is inspired by you, for you alone could know that I use black as a universal harmoniser." I was aghast. At that time I was far too unsophisticated to inspire anyone or anything, and I was young enough to feel highly flattered at the idea of having inspired so clever a man as Mr. Spielmann. "Also," he continued, "you have stolen my ideas. The eccentric hanging of this gallery brings ridicule upon the Master. Now, what do you propose to do? Your only hope of salvation is to walk up and down Bond Street with Pupil of Whistler printed in large letters on a sandwich board at your back, so that the world may know that it is I, Whistler who have created you. You will also write to The Pall Mall Gazette, and tell them that you have stolen my ideas; also you will call yourself a robber." By this time feeling quite flattened out and annihilated I said that I had no habits of letter-writing, but that I would insert a footnote in my catalogue and acknowledge the generous help of the Master in my artistic life. Whistler instantly turned upon me, more enraged than ever.

"Sir," he said, "your conduct savours, of the police court," and marched out of the gallery.

The last stab of all that I received from his rapier was after I had distempered my house in Fulham and it became talked about in the newspapers as "The Home of Taste"; it was in connection with this house that he had me interviewed for a Philadelphian newspaper. The interview was extraordinarily fantastic and purely imaginary, and Whistler ordered three thousand copies of it, which he distributed broadcast among my friends and his own. Some people received as many as three copies. His flooding of the studios with this interview was supposed to have killed me. From that moment I was looked upon as one no longer living, and Whistler sent me the following little note: " You will blow your brains out, of course. Pigot has shown you what to do under the circumstances, and you know your way to Spain. Good-by." The butterfly with which the note was signed was almost the cleverest part of it. It was represented with wings spread and back turned, soaring away, leaving behind it, on the end of a long tail, a venomed shaft.

From that time onwards, whenever my name was mentioned, Whistler was wont to say, "Eh, what? Meneps who's Meneps ? " All the poor little followers by whom he was surrounded echoed, and are no doubt echoing still: " Meneps ? Who's Meneps ? "

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Venice (1904)

Brittany (1905)

Paris (1907)

Books by Mortimer Menpes

Whistler as I Knew him (1904)

Portrait Biographies (1906) (Lord Kitchener & Lord Roberts)

Sir Henry Irving (1906)

Books illustrated by Mortimer Menpes

The Grey River by J McCarthy (1889)

Rembrandt by CL Hind (1905)

India by Flora Annie Steele (1905)

The Thames by GE Mitton, (1906)

Burma by Sir HA Blake (1909)

Gainsborough by James Greig (1909)

Peoples of Many Lands by GE Mitton (1910) (Menpes contributed 'the peoples of India')

Rembrandt - 16 examples of the artists work by CL Hind (1911)