



A Painter
in the
Arctic Regions.

From the Studio.

It was a very hot day when I passed through the Military Salon of Messrs. Graves' Galleries in Pall Mall, in search of Mr. Stokes, the Arctic painter. Therein, eagerly scanning the big canvases, were iron-grey officers looking as hot as the battle-pieces by Caton-Woodville and other military painters, hung on the walls; a single step into the next gallery, and the cold blue of the far North was the prevailing note. There I found Mr. Stokes standing by his delightfully quiet pictures, appearing in perfect harmony with his work. Naturally one's first remarks were on the temperature, and the returned voyager confessed that he liked our summer far less than the previous one spent amid the eternal snow of McCormick Bay.

"You have been twice to the Arctic regions, have you not?" I began.

"Yes," Mr. Stokes replied. "I was artist member of the Peary Relief Expedition of 1892, and of the North Greenland Expedition in 1893-94. Why did I go? Well, chiefly from a belief that such unknown regions would yield a lot of new subjects, and I think you will agree with me that they did; but I do not think it is likely to become a popular sketching ground for many reasons. I had peculiar opportunities; we were very far north, only six hundred miles in a straight line from the Pole itself; and from the circumstance of my longest stay there being on the second visit, I got to know my surroundings, and was able to wait for exceptional effects. For you must not suppose many of these wonderful skies are normal to that region, any more than they are to our own. Indeed, the most surprising effects there, I never saw twice. For instance, that one, which I call 'The Gates of Hades,' happened by chance when we were out for a deer hunt in Olrik's Bay, September 10, 1893; the clouds piled up with the lurid effect I have tried to represent. No, the color is not a bit exaggerated; vivid as it is, it is not so dazzling as the actual sky was at the time I painted it. The calm water mirrored the fogbanks drifting over it, which were dyed to a blood-red by the sun shining through a cleft in the ice at our back. Did I paint all these on the spot? Why, yes. That is to say, all the sketches were done in the open, and these few larger pictures are merely transcripts of the notes made on the spot. I believe in working direct from Nature; but it was not an easy matter there. The paint froze as it left the brush, and rolled off in dry pellets. Sometimes, as, for instance, when I was making that sketch on the ice-foot at the head of the Bay, there was a driving storm of sleet all the time, so that I had literally to scrape the snow on my panel with a palette-knife, bit by bit, and drop the color into its place. Of course, under such circumstances I could only jot down the colors as quickly as possible out of doors; then in my studio, a well-lighted, big room, when it was warm I merely got the sketches into shape without altering anything."

"What time of the day did you paint mostly?"

"At midnight or thereabouts, as a rule; you see there is no great difference in the light all the four-and-twenty hours round. That sketch, for instance, of Bowdoin Bay, I distinctly remember making under peculiar circumstances."

"On August 5th we steamed to the head of the

Bay and went ashore, drawing up our boat after us. Then heading over the ice-bed, we ascended gradually, planting poles here and there to guide us on our return journey. At 10 in the evening we had just spliced a pole and planted it, dead tired by a walk of eight miles, during which we had climbed some 3,300 feet; we had not brought snow-shoes, and were consulting on the advisability of sending some of our party back for them. So Professor Heilbrun and three men decided to return, while eight men went forward to plant another pole; just as the Professor had started away and had gone a few hundred yards, we saw a speck on the horizon and heard hollowing and shouting. It was Peary, for whom we were in search; for in those regions sound travels an enormous distance. Our party saw him first, so we waited for the others to join us. We were then wet through, having been up to our knees in snow all the way, and often stepping in crevices up to our armpits. As we waited, a sea of mist rolled up; away below us was the Bay, completely hidden. After a while Peary came up to us, and we went back to the ship, to be received with cheers and great excitement. I went to bed at once—it was about four or five p.m.—and slept until nine the next evening, the 6th of August. Then I got up and went ashore with my sketching materials, walked two miles, and painted the sketch which I have entitled "A Greenland Valley," getting back to the ship about two p.m., August 7th. The valley is full of fresh water pools formed by melted ice and snow. It is carpeted with moss and grass, and has many ferns and flowers; myriads of mosquitoes, butterflies, humble-bees, flies and other insects swarm there. That anecdote will give you a better idea of the difficulties that are met there than any merely general descriptions would."

"Are the natives civilized?"

"Why yes, in a way; they have their own notions and customs, some of which seem odd to us; but they are very intelligent. There in that painting, 'The Ing-muk-toe,' is one of their homes, a typical igloo; I painted the picture just as you see it, sitting in this corner. It wasn't very much space to work in, about two yards by one. Those girls, who are stripped all but a waist cloth, have just been sleeping between furs. Is that another girl? Why, no; that is the son of the old fellow next to him, who is a medicine man. If his face were in repose you would see what a fine type of countenance it is. They look, and are, very kind and very shrewd. Here, in this 'Innuite Seamstresses,' are two girls mending clothes in the open air—it is late July, so that it is comparatively warm."

"Their costume is just like that of the men, is it not?"

"There is not much difference, certainly. The women wear sealskin trousers, and an upper garment also of sealskin, with a hood shaped pouch to carry the babies. That strip of bare flesh which shows at her thigh, is for ventilation. In the dry atmosphere one perspires very freely; in this condition it would be fatal to rest in the open after exertion, unless some means of ventilation were adopted."

"The atmosphere inside the huts must be frightful, is it not?"

"Well, it is bad until you grow accustomed to it. We had, during our second visit, very good quarters, a regularly built encampment with two wooden houses, my studio, and a covered promenade for exercise. You will see a sketch of it in 'The Camp of the North Greenland Expedition.'"

And so with modest annotations to the already excellent catalogue, Mr. Stokes made his pictures even more interesting. Although quite apart from their subject, these paintings are good enough to establish a reputation. The artist is singularly modest in his recital; indeed, he displays the

quiet absence of pride, which often distinguishes those whose achievements are patent to all men. The superb beauty of the Arctic skies, even under normal conditions, with the high light of the ice always accentuating their tone; the chromatic wonder of the Aurora in its own birthplace, the novel schemes of color in blues and greens which are like those in aquamarines, emeralds and sapphires, made the gallery a feast for the eye as well as for the imagination. To see topographical subjects rendered with the distinguished technique that is the glory of the best modern school, is in itself a pleasant novelty. It is hard to get the public to accept two distinct points of view, and it is to be feared that the very interest of the anecdotal side of the picture caused grave injustice to be done to their intrinsic merit.

With the one exception of Mr. William Stott, of Oldham, no one, in England at all events, has painted snow, and the sky above it, as Mr. Stokes has done. Some lines by Mr. Bliss Carman—"A white eternity aglow with silent dawn, still-aired and passionless"—express the keynote of these delightful impressions. The accomplished technique that has portrayed the poetry of the one tract as yet untrod by man—the one secret of the world-sphinx which he has not guessed save in part—no doubt made the result still more impressive. To those who saw Mr. Stokes' exhibition, it will always live as a vivid record of things only dreamt of before—a record of wonder and novelty, that is by infinitely subtle differences of color and atmosphere nearer akin to the light of romance which never yet shone on sea or land, than that on any other landscapes one remembers. Those who did not enjoy the pleasure of seeing these unique sketches and pictures many times, may think the eulogy strained, but of all the thousands of pictures seen by the present writer in 1895, these alone make the year an *annus mirabilis*, for they imparted an entirely new sensation.

A novel and interesting exhibition of the work of the Art Student's League, will take place at Roberts' gallery, beginning November 28th. The exhibition will take the form of a retrospective view of the work of the League during the ten years of its existence.

All water-colors and black-and-white will be *passé-partout*. None of the sketches will be framed. Sketches from nature and life, designs for book illustrations and original sketches for well known magazines will be shown.

A colored artist of note, who is a Canadian by birth, resides in Providence, R.I. He was born in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, and is of mixed origin—French, Indian and African.

As a child he was a passionate lover of nature in all its color combinations. His African blood shows itself in his love of sunny studies. He dislikes the moonlight, and hates darkness.

After considerable hardship due to his touch of race color, he settled down to the study of art in Boston under Dr. Mimmer.

His most noted effort was "Under the Oaks," which received a gold medal at the Philadelphia Centennial. This picture was sold to a Mr. Duff, of Boston, for \$1,500.

Since then Mr. Bannister has labored very industriously, exhibiting each year in Boston, and making a comfortable living.

Mr. Bannister's studio is very pleasantly situated in a large building, almost entirely occupied by artists. There is nothing about it to suggest the Afro-American except the painter himself and a portrait of his wife.

Mrs. Bannister is a woman of note. Her history is very interesting. She descended from a noted Narragansett chief.

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