

Thirty cities of the United States requested the privilege of showing Whistler's "Mother." Eighteen of this number have had to be disappointed because of the time limit set on the loan of the painting to this country. Its year-and-a-half visit to the native land of its painter, however, had been very generous and when the "mother" returns to The Louvre she will carry with her the good will of the more than two million Americans who have seen her here.

TIGHT BINDING

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In its nation-wide tour that is just coming to an end, Whistler's famous portrait of his mother has been variously reported as valued at sums ranging from five hundred thousand to three million dollars. To clear up this misapprehension, the Museum of Modern Art, custodian of the painting in this country, stated that the Louvre set the insurance valuation of the picture at a million dollars when negotiations for its loan were begun in the spring of 1932. Later the Louvre cut this sum in half when it was pointed out that the high insurance premiums for the original sum would prevent this country from exhibiting the best known painting of its most famous native artist. Extreme precautions have been taken to safeguard the "Mother" wherever it has been exhibited, and, after a final four-day showing at the Museum of Modern Art beginning next Tuesday, it will be returned unharmed to France on May 19.

Whatever its valuation, Whistler's "Portrait of the Artist's Mother" is the most popular picture ever painted by an American. To the millions who have seen it in this country it is known simply as "Whistler's Mother." The name the artist first gave it, however, was "An Arrangement in Grey and Black." He later exhibited it under the title "Arrangement in Black and Grey," and once listed its title as "Portrait of My Mother."

Multiplicity of names seems to have been a feature of Whistler's life. He was born July 10, 1834, in Lowell, Mass., and was christened "James Abbott." There was no "McNeill" included in his name until seventeen years later, when he entered West Point. Scouting danger ahead, quick-witted James immediately added his mother's maiden name to his own. He knew his propensity for talking. It was as impossible for him to restrain his tongue as his pencil. So he rechristened himself to prevent the other cadets from nicknaming him with his own initials --J.A.W.

To his mother Whistler was always "Jemie" or "Jamie." The earliest Whistler drawing that has been preserved was made by the artist at the age of four as he sprawled under the dressing table

in his mother's room where she lay ill in bed. It is a very fine portrait of a duck, the drawing firm and strong and remarkably accurate for a child of four.

To his mother's diary we are indebted for many charming and amusing incidents in the life of a great artist growing up. From his earliest years young James had such an intense interest in art that his mother was obliged to restrain him from too much application to it, on account of his delicate health. Even when ill the boy's constant request was for his pencil. Once when taking a hot foot-bath to ward off a cold, he called for paper and colors and made a study of his feet as they steamed in the bath.

So many stories have been told of Whistler's wit and sarcasm and of his ability to make enemies that there are people even today who wonder how he could have painted such a "sentimental" picture as the portrait of his mother. Whistler was not one to wear his heart on his sleeve. Like many sarcastic individuals, he was extremely sensitive and hid his deeper emotions. When he exhibited his mother's portrait as "An Arrangement in Grey and Black," he said to a friend: "To me it is interesting as a picture of my mother, but what can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?"

The painting was hung in his bedroom or in his studio. One day as a friend stood beside him before the painting in the studio, the mask Whistler wore for the world slipped. The friend remarked on the beauty of the portrait. For a moment Whistler was silent, regarding his mother's likeness. Then he murmured, "Yes...yes. One does like to make one's Mummy just as nice as possible."

His mother kept house for him in London during many stormy years of Whistler's life, but she died before substantial success and honor came to him. It is interesting to know that the tide fortune began to turn in his favor with the sale of his mother's portrait to the French Government in 1891. M. Bourgeois, Minister of Fine Arts at that time, expressed some doubt that the artist would sell so fine a masterpiece at the small price the French nation could offer him. But Whistler wrote M. Bourgeois at once that more than all his paintings he would prefer for the "Mother" that "solemn consecration." The French national paid four thousand francs for the picture and it was hung in the Luxembourg, where Whistler had studied other masterpieces in his art student days in Paris. After his death the painting went to the Louvre.

But his mother's picture brought Whistler more than the meagre sum of \$800 (4,000 francs). The year the French Government bought the painting it made the artist an Officer in the Legion of Honour. Whistler valued this more than almost any other honor ever bestowed on him. In the years that followed, success and recognition came to him in increasing measure, but it is not too much to say that Whistler's greatest honors and most lasting fame have come to him through the portrait of a gentle old lady painted by a devoted son.