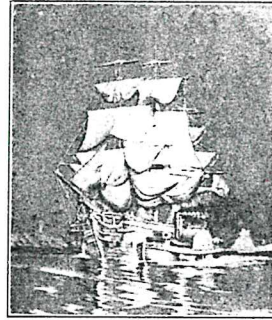


Chinese Junk, 1825.
(Copyright, F. D. Millet, 1908.)

Mr. F. D. MILLET'S
Decorations



Liverpool Packet, 1840.
(Copyright, F. D. Millet, 1908.)

IN THE

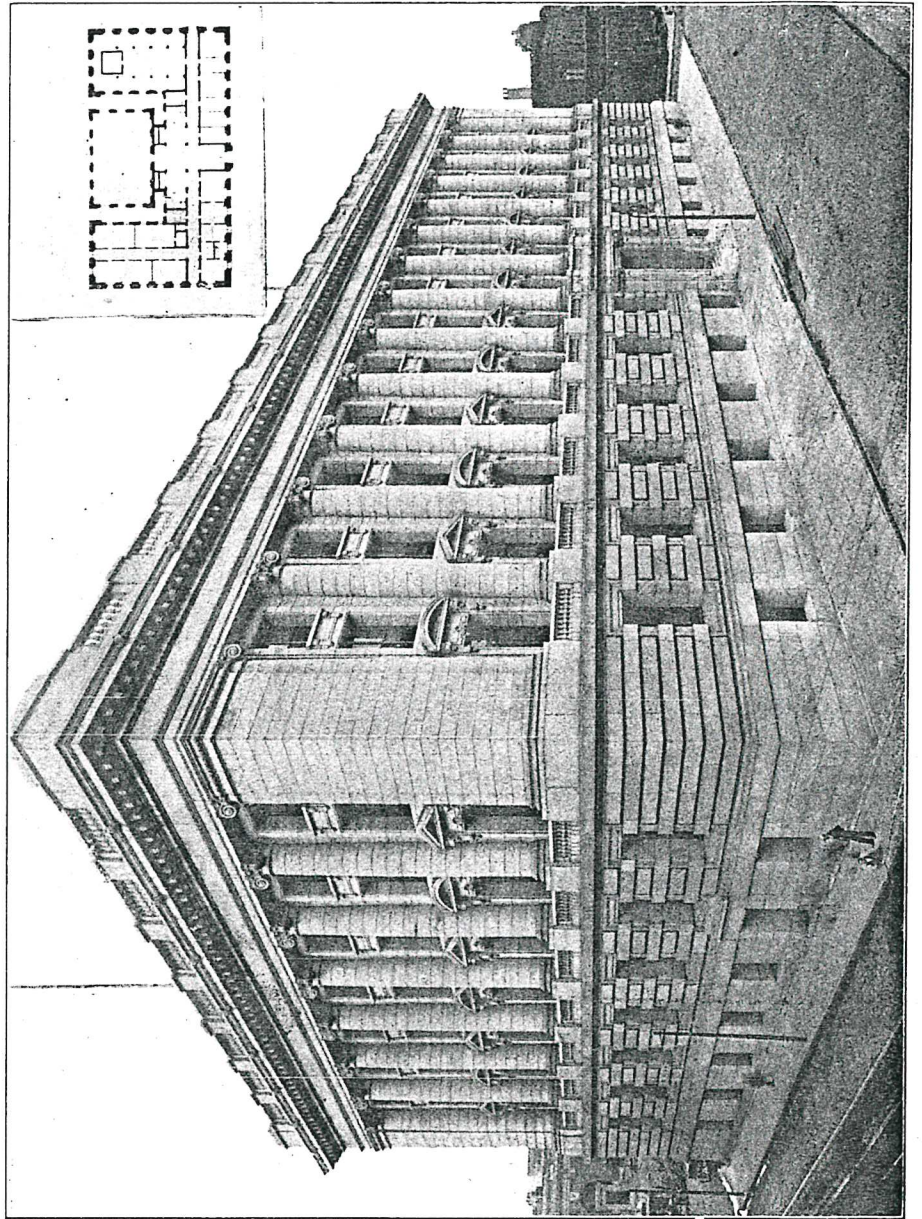
Baltimore Custom House

Within the past few years the art of mural painting has experienced rapid development in America. Its birth in this new land is dated from the time the late H. H. Richardson gave to John La Farge the commission to decorate Trinity Church, Boston; and at the World's Fair at Chicago it is supposed to have come of age. Since, in 1897, the Library of Congress, at Washington, served as a practice field for those who essayed to pursue this specialty, there has been a veritable epidemic of mural painting, so that a public building without such adornment is now rather the exception than the rule. The fact that the new Custom House at Baltimore, designed by Messrs. Hornblower & Marshall, and completed only last January, has been added to the list of those thus adorned would, therefore, be of comparative insignificance were not its decorations of exceptional merit and unusual character.

As in the case of Trinity Church, the commission for the decoration of this entire building was given to a single artist, and herein did the architects not only follow a good precedent, but manifest special wisdom. Mr. F. D. Millet, to whom the work was entrusted, had had both training and experience. In 1876 he assisted Mr. La Farge with his first commission, in 1893 he acted as Director of Decoration at the Columbian Exposition, and before 1907 he had executed some notable mural paintings for various public buildings. Bet-

ter than the majority he understood the interdependence of the arts of construction and design, and was able to cope with a diversified problem. It was an opportunity to show what could be done under such conditions, and Mr. Millet is not one to waste opportunities. In order to be in continual touch with the architects of the building he opened a studio in Washington, utilizing an old, disused public hall on what was formerly known as "High Street" in Georgetown. There the principal mural paintings for the Baltimore Custom House were executed—not single-handed, of course, but with the aid of six or seven young assistants. Contrary to custom, Mr. Millet was not hurried, and whereas his one-time master was given four months to decorate a great church he was granted more than two years to devise his scheme and execute his decorations. And it was worth it. A new departure has been made in mural painting—a higher standard set for interior decoration.

The problem given Mr. Millet was to design decorations of a significant character for the principal room of the building—the "Call Room"—and to devise a color scheme for the walls and ceilings of all the corridors and office rooms; in other words, to completely beautify one unit and to create for it an environment which would be altogether harmonious. In order to fully appreciate the solution, therefore, it will be necessary to consider, first, if but



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BALTIMORE CUSTOM HOUSE.

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briefly, the building itself. Indeed, in this one instance so closely are the decorations related to the structure, so truly is the finish part and parcel of the design that it is impossible to regard the one independently of the other.

Externally, the United States Custom House at Baltimore is impressive, dignified and grave. It is of granite, and the motive of the design has been apparently to attain a scale and a simplicity of elevation suitable to this material. The exterior walls and main partitions are entirely of masonry, though steel columns and beams, with terra cotta floors, make the rest of the interior construction. The plan is E-shaped, with a frontage on Gay street of about 252 feet, and on the side streets of about 140 feet, the central feature being the Call Room in the re-entring court, lighted on three sides. There are two stories in the base, three comprised within the column height of the Ionic order, and one in the attic, lighted from the roof. The scale of the stonework will be sufficiently suggested by the length of the lintel stones over the columns which measure seventeen and one-half feet.

This was the fifth public building awarded under the "Tarsney Act," which authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to employ architects outside of the government service to design government buildings, and it was begun and completed under the administration of James Knox Taylor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury, under Secretaries Gage, Shaw and Cortelyou. Its cornerstone was laid in June, 1903, and when the great fire of 1904 occurred it had reached its third-story floor, and the columns were up to about half their height. The effect this fire had upon it was both interesting and curious. Directly, it did it little harm, but indirectly it contrived to reverse its façades. At the time the building was designed a large brick structure stood adjacent to the rear on land which the government had not seen fit to purchase when it procured the Custom House site. This, to all intents and purposes, was a permanent fixture—a perpetual

screen to the public building's rear; but the fire completely demolished it, and the desirability of an entrance on that side being patently demonstrated, the land was procured and a plaisance on that side is now being planned. Truly might the architects congratulate themselves that they had not followed common practice and expended the major part of their appropriation on the main façade of their building, feeling comfortably assured that the rear would never be seen, and well would it be if the lesson were taken to heart and less public buildings erected with an obvious back and front. This may be thought in a measure irrelevant, but it is an explanation due the architects, and may be found indicative of the spirit of their work. While the architectural design of the Custom House at Baltimore is virile and good, the charm of the building lies in its carefully considered plan and in its more than admirable finish. The building is essentially suited to its purpose, and every detail has apparently been thoughtfully studied and brought into relation with the whole. The interior is by no means ornate; it is, in fact, extremely simple, but there is no crudity, no cheapness, no haphazard effect. The proportioning of all the parts has been skilful—the height of the ceilings is in keeping with the size of the rooms, the halls are neither too wide nor too narrow, the relation of the door and window openings has been nicely adjusted, ornament has been handled reticently, materials made to manifest their inherent character. The piers, pilasters, dado and doorways on the first floor are finished in marble, of a warm yellow-gray, from Hauteville, France; not polished, but rubbed to a flat surface, and on the floors above, for the same purpose, white Vermont marble is substituted. The stairways and the floors of the halls and corridors throughout are of pink Tennessee marble, with, on the first floor—the main entrance and passage—a bordering of Sienna pink and umber veined marble. In two instances marbles have been used, and well used, in this building for purely decorative pur-



The "Call Room," showing Mr. F. D. Millet's mural decorations on walls and ceilings. The decorative panels which are reproduced on following pages are some of those shown in this view.

Hornblower & Marshall, Architects.

poses, large slabs of Italian Breccia Violetta marble, rubbed to a flat surface and so set as to repeat their veined design, being effectively placed on either side of the principal entries, and a stringer of "Roseal" Tennessee marble being employed as paneling on the stairs. The doors, frames and other wood finish throughout the building is oak.

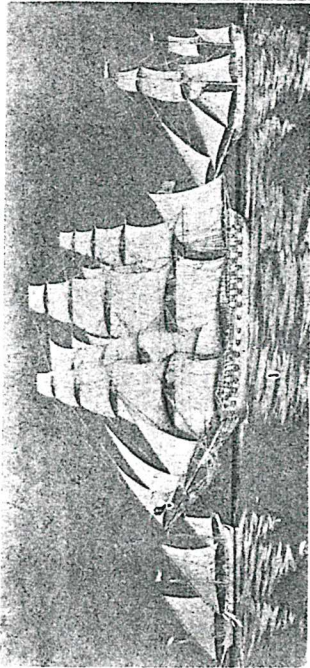
As will be seen from the plan and accompanying illustrations, the main entrance of this building opens into a spacious vestibule and broad stair hall, from which, to the right and left, the office corridors lead. The stair hall is lighted from the roof; the corridors by windows at their extremities and transoms on their course. The quantity of light and the materials already employed influenced Mr. Millet in his selection of colors for the walls, and while those he chose are not those which convention would prescribe, they are without question peculiarly appropriate and pleasing. The walls of the stair hall from the main floor to the roof have been tinted a green-gray, and given, above the dado, in darker tint, a stencilled border of little conventionalized dolphins. The walls of the corridors on the first and second floors have been painted a vibrant vermilion, those on the third floor burnt orange, and on the fourth floor—the attic story—gray. The borders on each floor are varied, but as in the case of the stair hall, sea forms have been utilized as motives of design. On the red the borders are in Naples yellow, which is more effective and less pretentious, by far, than gold. The walls of the office rooms throughout have been finished in grav-green, with dark green dados, with the exception of that occupied by the Collector of Customs, in which the decorations are rich shades of dull metallic blue and green. This tends to an harmonious scheme throughout, and as the doors of the offices not only may stand open, but are fitted with paneling of clear glass, the value of unity is perennially manifested. A word, too, should be said of the way in which Mr. Millet has employed light tints for the

ceilings and thus brought the beams and cornices into key with the walls while retaining the structural proportions.

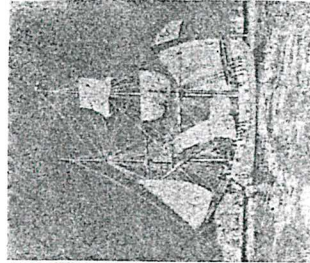
This leads quite naturally to the consideration of the Call Room, which is not only the principal room of the building, but the setting for Mr. Millet's pictorial history of "The Ship." It may, however, be advisable at this juncture to turn aside for a moment and note the decoration of the Sub-Treasury, lest later it be forgotten.

In functional importance this room is only secondary to the Call Room, and in finish it is nowise inferior. Situated at the extreme north end of the "E." with half of its windows on the court, and much of its wall space occupied by vaults, it is not particularly well lighted, and white and gold were, therefore, chosen for its decoration. Panels with ornamental lettering—inscriptions worthy of being held in perpetual remembrance—ornament the walls of the lobby, and a conventional design in which the seal of the Treasury is a central motive occupies a place over the door, the purpose being obviously to obliterate plainness rather than to create impression. To prevent the monotony of an unadulterated white and gold scheme a little insistent blue has been introduced back of the moldings on the ceiling which, while practically unnoticeable, infinitely enlivens the effect. The marble work in this room is green-veined Italian Pavonazzo from Massa-Carrara district, the screens iron and bronze.

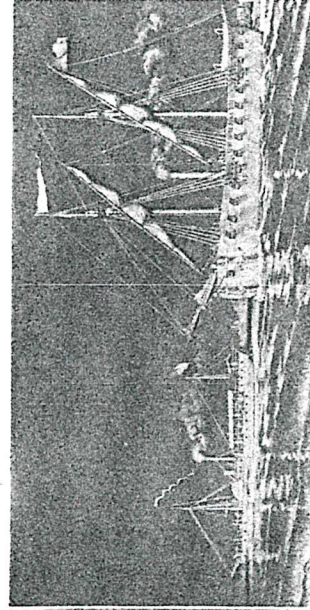
Passing now into the Call Room, the door of which, by-the-way, is opposite the main entrance, one finds it to be rectangular in form, about 90 by 57 feet, with a height not exceeding 34 feet. The appearance is that of a banking establishment, the floor space being divided off by screens and the center of the room occupied by writing tables similar to check desks. Its architectural treatment, of coupled Ionic pilasters, standing against the piers of a continuous wall arcade and supporting a paneled and bracketed frieze, surmounted by a dentil and medallion cornice, above



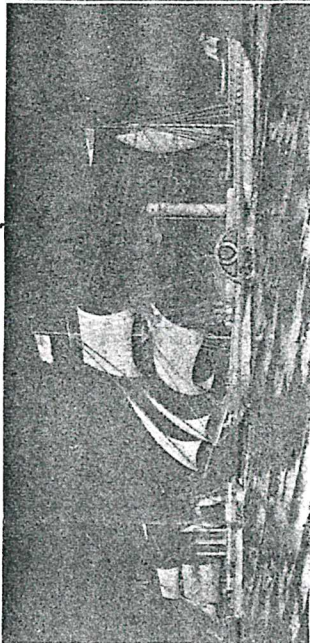
Barbary Pirate,
1797.



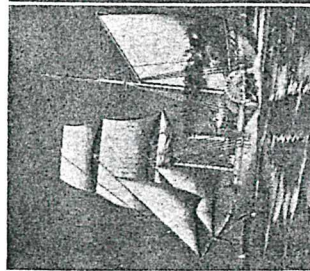
The "Constitution," Man-of-War Ketch,
1800.



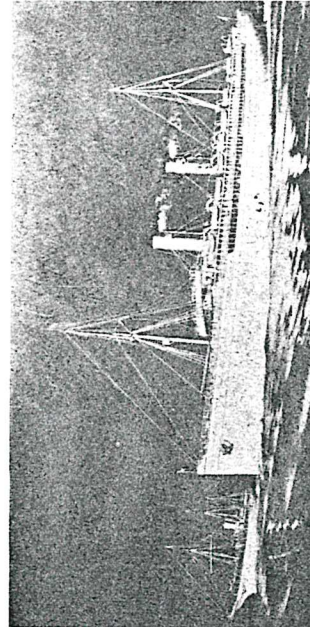
A Snow,
1800.



The "Fulton the Second,"
1837.



The "Sirius," 1838.



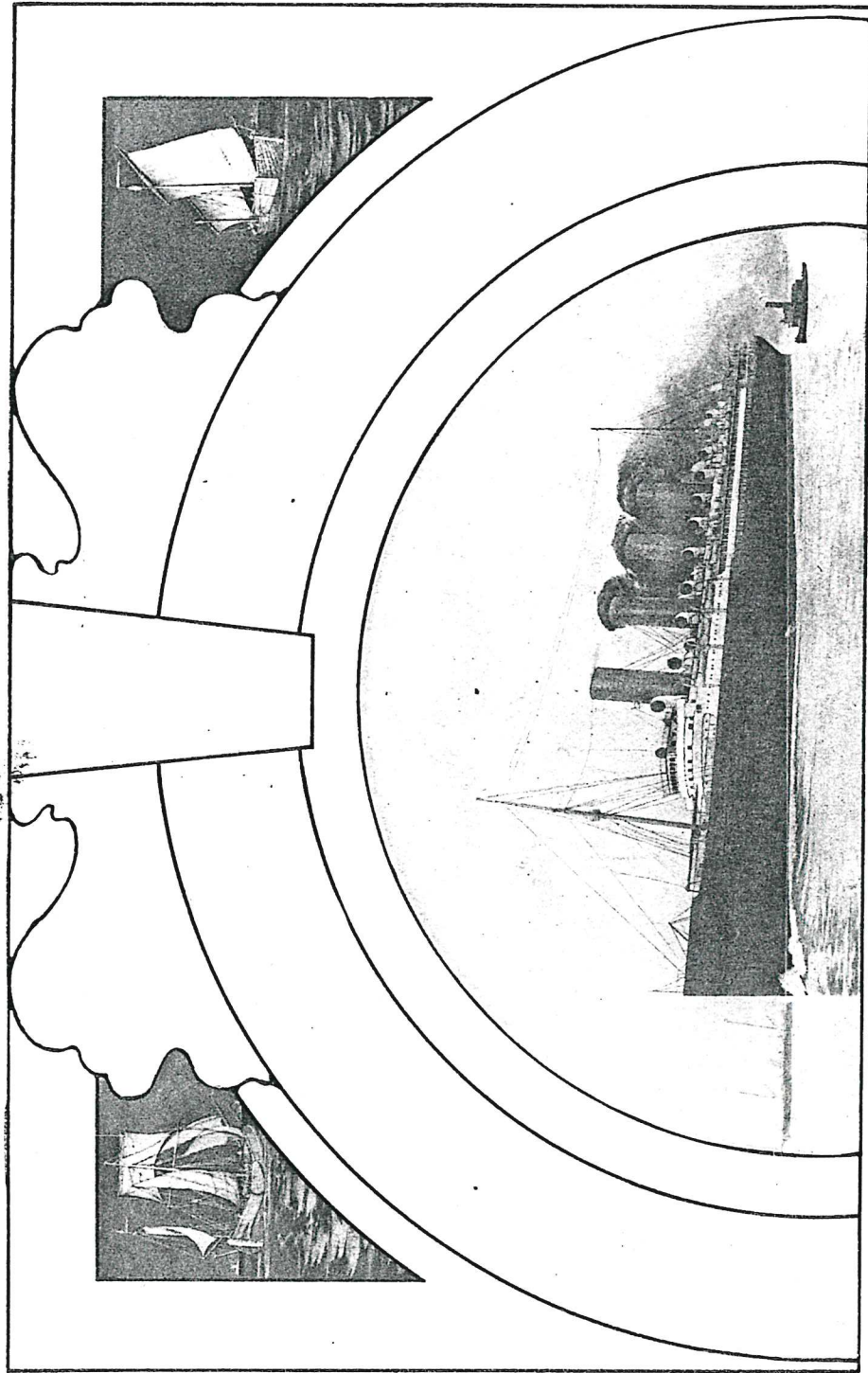
Coastwise Steamer, 1822.

The Yacht "Kanawha."

The S. S. "St. Paul."

DECORATIVE PANELS FROM THE CEILING COVE OF THE "CALL ROOM," BY F. D. MILLET.—BALTIMORE CUSTOM HOUSE.
Baltimore, Md.

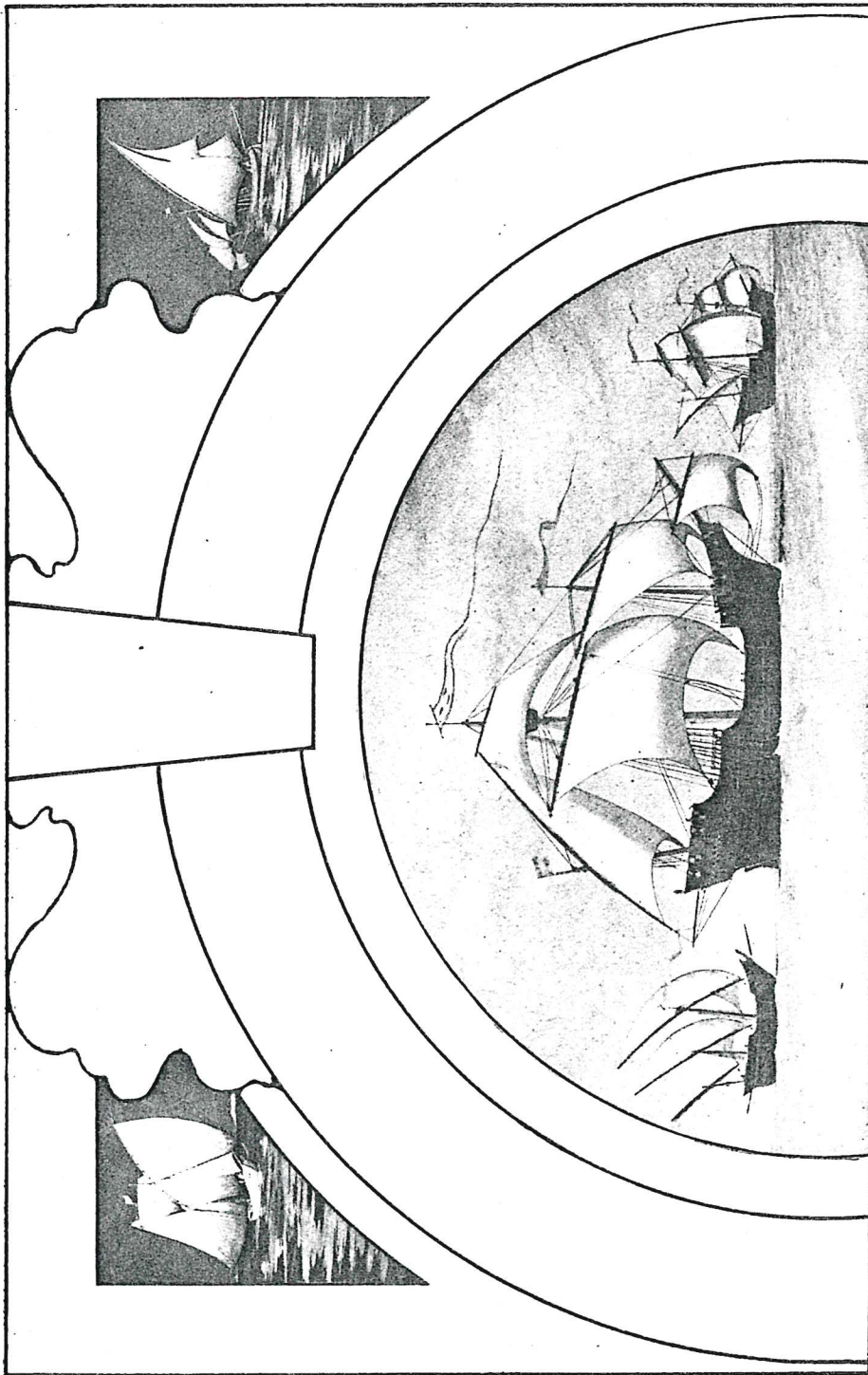
(Copyright, F. D. Millet, 1908.)
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DECORATIONS OF THE ARCH OVER THE ENTRANCE TO THE "CALL ROOM," SHOWN ON PAGE 101.
BALTIMORE CUSTOM HOUSE.
(Copyright, F. D. Millet, 1908.)

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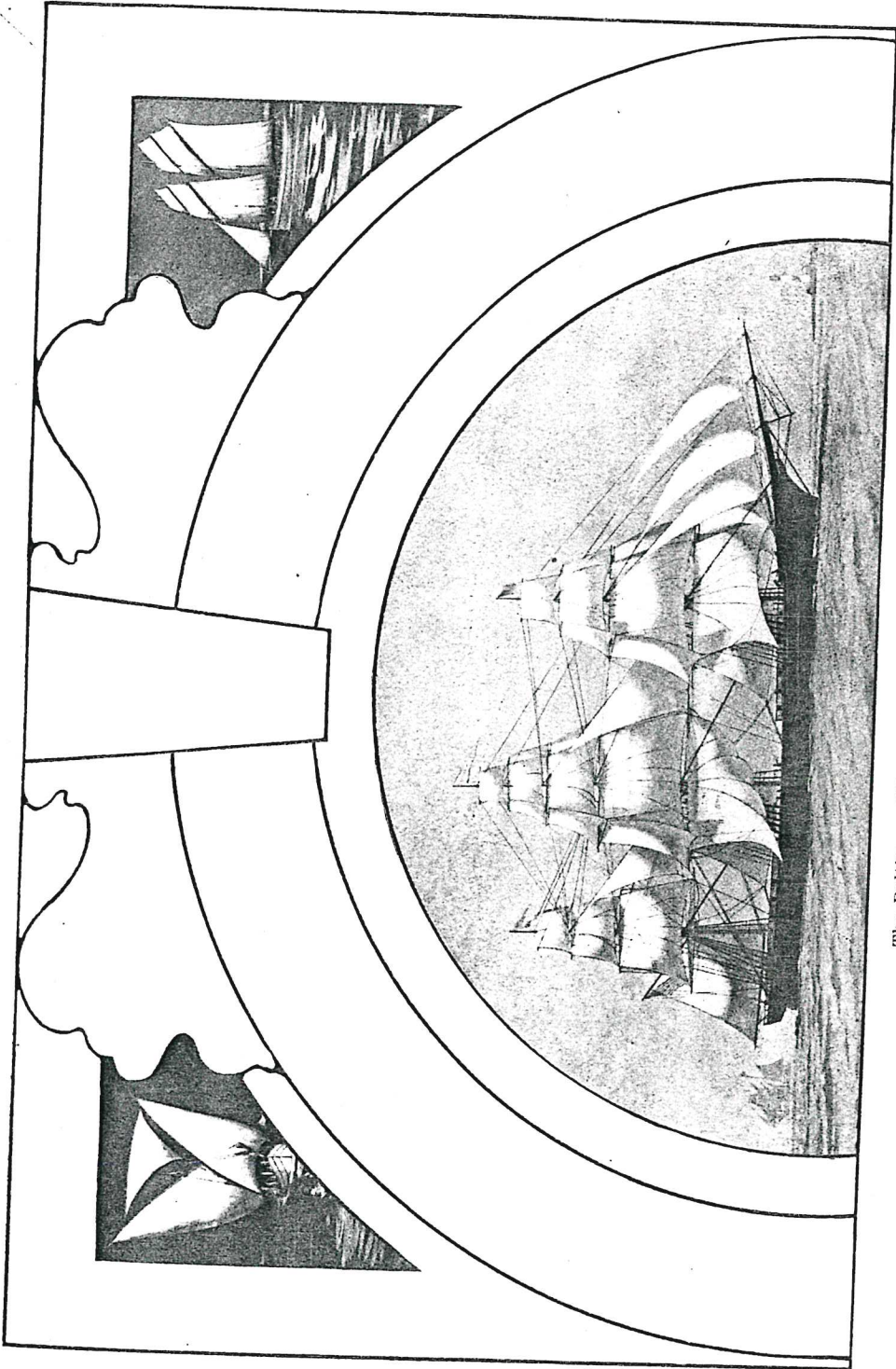


A Spanish Caravel between two French Caravels (End of the Fifteenth Century).
LUNETTE AND SPANDRELS, BY F. D. MILLET, IN THE "GALLI ROOM."—BALTIMORE CUSTOM HOUSE.
(Copyright, F. D. Millet, 1908.)
Hornblower & Marshall, Architects.
Baltimore, Md.

while a depressed cove merges into the strongly enframed single panel of the ceiling, is produced in stucco, with a general finish in Caen stone cement. The lower part of the counter screen is in Italian marble, the face of Pavonazzo from Pietra Santa, of rich color and veining, with a base of Verde Antico Reboro from Campromorane, and a top of Verde Antico from Thessaly. From this, one's eye rises to the paintings—to the lunettes of the arcade, with the tiny spandrels over their shoulders, to the wonderful series of blue and green panels which form, in the cove, a frieze; to the beautiful borders which serve as frames, and finally to the ceiling itself, which seems like a fair dream. It is wonderful that so many objects, such a multiplicity of facts, could be crowded into so small a space without confusion! Not once, however, does it seem that the chronicler has got the upper hand of the decorator—that the artist has given way to the historian. Here is meaning, and plenty; here are records, and ones that are trustworthy, and yet here is real art and true decoration. If the man who has business with the Custom House wishes to study out the significance of these wall paintings he may, but whether or no, the environment which they create must impress him. The effect is charming, the style unique. The ceiling and cornice were not designed to suit Mr. Millet's decorations, but the decorations made to fit them. Because the moldings and ornaments which were to serve as the frames to these paintings were frankly plaster (no gilt has been used in the room), Mr. Millet made his decorations manifest the inherent quality of this medium, and selecting as backgrounds flat blue and green tints which were opaque he wrought his designs in white in the style of cameos. The colors are positive, but very delicate—the ships clear-cut in outline, finely modeled, beautiful in form. Thus Mr. Millet brought into unity his several motives, tied them together, conventionalized them, held fast to the spirit of decoration, and yet left himself free to be literal, accurate and as minute in detail as he pleased. Noth-

ing, perhaps, could have produced a happier result or one more completely insuring significance and effectiveness.

The history of shipping, from the earliest time to the present day, is given on the walls of the Call Room, and no pains has Mr. Millet spared to make it complete and graphic. He, himself, it is hoped, will some day tell of the searches he made for reliable data, of the way he more than once proved history incorrect, and how in unexpected places he stumbled upon valuable information, and in the meantime the literal-minded can rest upon the assurance that for every rope and spar and sail represented he had adequate authority. Probably few persons are aware that so many kinds of boats exist or existed as are pictured on the walls of this room, and even the nautically bred would scarcely relish the task of naming them. The panels in the border around the ceiling, of which there are twelve, illustrate the origin and development of the steamer. The panels in the cove, twenty-eight in number, more than half of which show groups of boats, illustrate the history of shipping from 1000 B. C. to the present time, the series opening with a pictorial representation of Egyptian, Greek and Roman galleys, and concluding with transcriptions of the warship "Olympia," the cup-defender "Reliance" and the transatlantic passenger steamer "St. Paul." Small craft of various periods, such as an Egyptian river boat, a Venetian gondola, a Dutch scallop, a flat Western river boat, a Chinese sampan, a lifeboat and a torpedo-boat destroyer are shown in the narrow panels over the arches, while in the spandrels to either side of these small sailing boats, to the number of thirty-two, are delightfully set forth. This, it would seem, might have left nothing for the five lunettes which occupy the arches on the one windowless wall, but for those Mr. Millet reserved special types most prominent in the evolution of shipping, which in a measure epitomize the history. Here, then, are found pictured a Spanish caravel between two French caravels, dating from the end of the fifteenth century; the Baltimore



Baltimore, Md.
The Baltimore Clipper "Empress of the Sea," 1853.
LUNETTE AND SPANDRELS, BY F. D. MILLET, IN THE "CALL ROOM."—BALTIMORE CUSTOM HOUSE.
(Copyright, F. D. Millet, 1908.)
Hornblower & Marshall, Architects.

clipper "Empress of the Sea," 1853; the "Mauretania," the steam yacht "Corsair" and a tug; a top-sail sloop and the British East Indiaman "Earl of Balcarras," end of the eighteenth century; and an English man-of-war between two Dutch vessels of the early seventeenth century. Unlike the panels in the cove and borders, these paintings are naturalistic—window openings looking out upon a real world. They are low in tone, atmospheric and to a degree decorative; but they do not entirely fit into the design, and they are not altogether convincing.

When Mr. Millet exhibited his decorations in his studio at Washington before they were sent to Baltimore, every one exclaimed "Beautiful!" but some looked dubiously at the great ships which were to be placed on the ceiling. Ships on a wall were very well, but ships overhead! That was a different matter. These doubts were certainly rational, but one visit to the Custom House now will dispel them. Words can scarcely describe the wonderful charm of this great ceiling decoration. A fleet of ten sailing vessels—ships, barks, a barkentine, a brig and a schooner—is seen entering a harbor on a hazy morning—all the sails are spread, and like gigantic sea-birds they seem to be drifting onward. All the mystery and the poetry of the sea is suggested, all its witchery and none of its awe. Soft, cumulous clouds float diagonally across the sky, the distance is veiled in mist, long reflections lie on the water.

The drawing has been accurately done, but color has been used sparingly—the pigment is by no means evident. Gentle browns, with ivory tints, prevail, and through them all a violet note asserts itself. Perfectly does the color scheme accord with the blues and greens of the cornice decoration; admirably does its spirit complement its style. The eye moves to and fro from the cameolike decorations to this apotheosis of the architecture of the sea with unalloyed pleasure, not contrasting, nor comparing, but delighting in each.

Too much the mural painters of our day have feared an idea, and too often they have become entangled in symbolism. Paintings which signify without being inherently literary are rare—commerce represented other than by an heroic female figure bearing some familiar token is scarcely recognizable. And yet why must we keep repeating the same old story—why not occasionally have a new thought? Mr. Millet has ventured it, and successfully. In every little factor of his decorations there is suggestion, appropriate significance. The plant forms which he has used for the border in the marginal ceiling panel are those native to Maryland—the dogwood, magnolia, maple, pine, oak and Indian corn—sea horses and scallop shells are used as elements in the design of the frames which enclose the small panels, and scrutinizing the lines in the lower border which decoratively fill in adjacent spaces it will be discovered that they are ropes. And yet all this, which might trick the fancy of the uninitiated, has been made thoroughly subservient to effect; it has to be sought out, it does not declare itself. What one sees first and last is a lovely mass of broken color, rhythmical lines, an effect of subdued gayety. Exquisite indeed are the pictures which Mr. Millet has put on the walls in this room wherein men daily transact ordinary business, and yet none too good are they for the place.

In conclusion, it may be interesting for the reader to know that the original appropriation to cover the cost of this building was one and a half million dollars, and with the exception of an allowance made by Congress to cover the contractor's loss by the great fire, it, including its decorations, was completed within that amount. This is an era of building enterprise, a time of growth and development, and every public building such as this, which reflects refinement of taste, genius in design and loving care in execution, marks an advance on the part of the nation and serves as a monument to the builders of our day.

Leila Mechlin.