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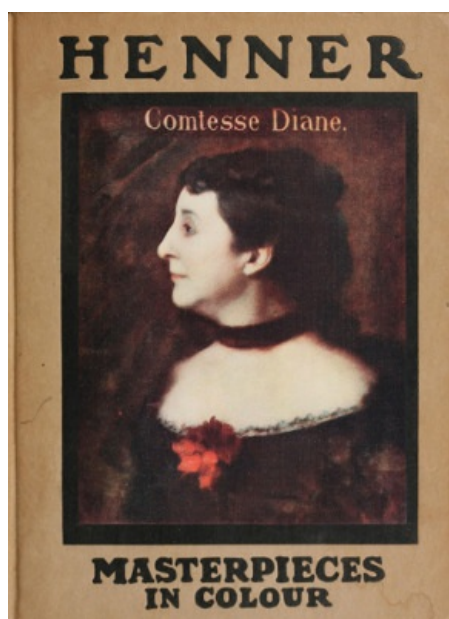
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MASTERPIECES
IN COLOUR
EDITED BY--
M. HENRY ROUJON

HENNER

(1829-1905)

IN THE SAME SERIES

REYNOLDS	LE BRUN
VELASQUEZ	CHARDIN
GREUZE	MILLET
TURNER	RAEBURN
BOTTICELLI	SARGENT
ROMNEY	CONSTABLE
REMBRANDT	MEMLING
BELLINI	FRAGONARD
FRA ANGELICO	DÜRER
ROSSETTI	LAWRENCE
RAPHAEL	HOGARTH
LEIGHTON	WATTEAU
HOLMAN HUNT	MURILLO
TITIAN	WATTS
MILLAIS	INGRES
LUINI	COROT
FRANZ HALS	DELACROIX
CARLO DOLCI	FRA LIPPO LIPPI
GAINSBOROUGH	PUVIS DE CHAVANNES
TINTORETTO	MEISSONIER
VAN DYCK	GÉRÔME
DA VINCI	VERONESE
WHISTLER	VAN EYCK
RUBENS	FROMENTIN
BOUCHER	MANTEGNA
HOLBEIN	PERUGINO
BURNE-JONES	ROSA BONHEUR

**PLATE I.--THE LITTLE GIRL WITH THE BLUE RIBBON
(Petit Palais des Beaux-Arts)**

This little portrait, charmingly delicate and delightful in colouring, belongs to the first period of the painter's life. None the less, it is remarkable in execution and in truth.



HENNER

BY FR. CRASTRE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY FREDERIC TABER COOPER

ILLUSTRATED WITH EIGHT
REPRODUCTIONS IN COLOUR



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There is no one who has not chanced, sooner or later, to pass the window of some picture dealer and find himself irresistibly attracted by a canvas forming a patch of fluid gold, a luminous vapour bathing the white body of a woman, white with that rich, warm whiteness that reveals, through the transparency of the skin, the inner flame, the bounding blood, the pulsing life. Such a picture was a Henner. And when you have come into contact, if only for once, with a work by this incomparable artist, the effect is lasting; you recognize any and all of his works at the first glance, just as you recognize a friend in the street, even before he is near enough for you to distinguish his features. So personal is Henner's manner, and so original his product, that it is impossible to confound him with any other painter, just as no other painter has ever been able or even attempted to imitate a type of which he alone possessed the magic secret. Although the tomb has barely closed above him, Henner has already entered upon his heritage of glory. Or should we not rather say that he had entered upon it during life, and that the unanimity of admiration which always followed him was in the nature of a definitive judgment, which posterity has nothing left to do but ratify? Among the most illustrious of our modern painters, Henner is the one who possesses to the highest degree the art of imprisoning light, of playing with it, of making it vibrate, of using it to illumine the most profound woodland shades, or to set it palpitating over feminine flesh. We must not seek within our own times for any other with whom to compare him; for this we must look backward, far backward, to the period of that glorious Venetian school of which he seems to be a direct product. From Giorgione he derives his warm and living flesh tints; it would seem that Titian had bequeathed to him his profound and powerful mastery of colour; and if Correggio could see the Nymphs and Bathing Women of Henner, he would certainly recognize in them that same velvety delicacy and vaporous lightness with which he himself was wont to envelop his female forms.

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**PLATE II.--RECLINING NYMPH
(Luxembourg Museum)**

In accordance with Henner's favourite formula, the dazzling whiteness of the nymph's body acquires an astonishing relief through contrast with the sombre verdure, yet even the very shadows are penetrated by a warm and vibrant light.



For Henner was, above all else, a painter of women. "It was in the female form that he sought and found perfect Beauty, complete, indisputable, and undisputed, a victorious, compelling Beauty that silences all criticism, all indecision by its multifold splendour, the infinite variety of its complex forms, a Beauty embodied in contrast, harmony, charm, freshness, and grace, but with no element of the merely pretty or fantastic." Henner's women are without affectation, or morbidity, or coquetry, or pretence. They are tall, strong, supple, stately, superb, like the antique type itself. Their beauty is without a flaw. Their flesh is steeped in light, their hair a tissue of living radiance. Such is the clue to their irresistible seductiveness.

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It has been said of Henner that he was the painter of blondes. He was more especially the painter of the red-blonde type, for the reason that light, falling upon the ruddy glint of their tresses, awakens flame-like reflections and emphasizes the satiny grain of their skin. This tawny, golden sheen is the most alive, the most vibrant, yet the most unobtrusive of all, and consequently the most harmonious and the most beautiful. But Henner also painted brunettes with an incomparable mastery; to be convinced of this, one needs only to refer to any of the innumerable portraits of dark-haired women that have come from his brush, notably those of Mme. Noetzelin, of Mme. Duchesne-Fournes, of the Comtesse de Jacquemont, and that of Mme. Karakehia which produced such a marked sensation in the Salon of 1876.

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While adhering to his own strongly personal manner, Henner nevertheless experimented in the most diverse types of painting, as we shall see in the course of the present study, and he was excellent in all of them, because he brought to them all those masterly qualities which make the greatness of a painter: impeccable line-work, a powerful command of colour, and a perfect knowledge of his art acquired through the constant pursuit of beauty and of truth.

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Jean-Jacques Henner was born, on the 15th of March, 1829, in the village of Bernwiller, not far from Belfort, on the confines of Alsace.

This origin explains the strongly personal character of his talent. Offspring as he was of a land that once was German,--and that, alas, has once again become so, after having been impregnated for several centuries with the refinement and the good taste of France,--Henner unites in himself the dominant qualities of both races: from Germany he derives his laborious energy, his tenacity, his spirit of research, his poetic dreaminess; to the French imprint he owes the delicacy, the good taste, the grace, the subtlety, the careful weighing of effects, that distinguish all his work.

Jean-Jacques Henner was the youngest child of a numerous family. His parents were modest tillers of the soil, who nevertheless had won the general esteem of the neighbourhood. Of little education, but honest and industrious, Henner's father was rewarded for his integrity and blameless life by being appointed to the office of village tax collector. With as little learning as her husband, his mother possessed a dreamy spirit and a very keen intelligence. It was she who first discerned in the thoughtful and rather backward boy the germs of his future talent; it was also she who encouraged and sustained him with her wise affection when the first promise of his future talent was revealed. 19

His vocation manifested itself at an early age. Little Jean-Jacques could barely read when he had already begun to adorn the walls with charcoal figures that "fairly stood on their feet," and proved that the child possessed a precocious power of observation. In some of these sketches it was easy to recognize certain frequent visitors to the house, friends and neighbours; and the good-hearted villagers used to come and admire these attempts. Quite surprised at these proclivities, his father, instead of interfering with the boy's natural bent, did his best to encourage it. Being unable to provide him with a drawing-master,--and for that matter the child was still too young,--he supplied him with models, in the shape of the familiar Epinal coloured prints which little Jean-Jacques tried to reproduce to the best of his ability. It certainly was not through the aid of these naïve and rudimentary essays in colour work that Henner learned the art of drawing, but they at least served to strengthen his desire to learn, and gave him facility in handling his pencil. 20

The father of little Jean-Jacques served him as best he could; it was he who laid the corner-stone of his son's future glory. In that humble household, where each member had his appointed task, from the father down to the frailest child, Jean-Jacques was the only one who took no part in the labour of the fields; he was exempted in order to continue his education and develop his taste for drawing. 21

Even the neighbours, astonished at his precocity, aided him as best they could. One brought paper, another an old picture, another some prints found in an out-of-the-way corner of the house, still another a supply of paints. Thus equipped, the child worked with unflagging zeal, undertook to learn the use of colours, and in order to repay his benefactors, he made portraits of them, which are still preserved in those Alsatian households and which already reveal, in more than one of those likenesses that he always caught so well, the first germs of those qualities of a great portrait painter, such as he was one day destined to become. 21

"You will be a great artist," his father used to say, as he kissed him; for the good man foresaw, almost by divination, the glorious destiny that awaited his son. And addressing his other sons, all of them older than little Jean-Jacques, and all of them destined to pass their days in the hard labour of tilling the soil, he told them:

"When I am no longer here, I commend your brother to you. Aid him and sustain him. Help him to achieve his career. You will be repaid for it; this I promise you, in the name of the good God." 22

The brothers carried out piously and to the letter these commands of their father; while Henner, for his part, promised himself to fulfil his share of the bargain. He never forgot what he owed to his older brothers; and he paid them back a hundredfold for all the benefits that he had received.

**PLATE III.--PORTRAIT OF MLLE. L.
(Luxembourg Museum)**

This is one of the most curious portraits painted by the artist inasmuch as it attains a maximum of perfection in spite of a combination of the most unfavourable possible means. Notwithstanding the sombre garments that barely stand out against the dull blue background, the face reveals an extraordinary intensity of life.



At the age of seven, young Henner was required to go to church every day for the purpose of learning his catechism. In the chapel where the good curé of Bernwiller expounded the doctrine, there happened to be a picture representing St. Sebastian. This picture attracted the attention of the child irresistibly and was the cause of many moments of inattention which brought upon him the paternal rebukes of the priest. It was wasted severity. Little Jean-Jacques had eyes for nothing else than the saint, whose widely gaping shirt revealed the muscular throat and hairy chest; and he continued to stare at their robust anatomy which so strongly resembled that of the peasants whom he saw all about him in the village. 25

By a singular coincidence, this painting in by-gone days once reposed for quite a long time in the home of his grandfather, where Henner himself was born. An architect named Kléber, and destined to become later a famous general, was occupied in building the parish house in one of the neighbouring villages to Bernwiller. Coming by chance to Bernwiller, he saw the painting of St. Sebastian, which he found had been greatly impaired by age. He took steps to obtain its restoration and, while waiting for the appointed artist to arrive from Strassburg, he had it transferred to the house of Henner's grandfather. It was there that the artist from Strassburg repaired the painting, and it would almost seem as though there were some sort of obscure connection between this fact and the powerful impression which the picture produced upon the mind of little Jean-Jacques, and as though it were a sort of secret bond between the glory of the great warrior and that of the great painter. 26

A little later, young Henner was sent to attend school at Altkirch. Not however in the capacity of a boarding pupil, for the family did not have the means. Every day he had to cover on foot the two hours' journey, in order to reach school, and the same to return. But the child possessed the sacred fire: the kilometres seemed to him no more than a pleasant walk.

As good luck would have it, the school at Altkirch possessed a drawing-master, named Goutzwiller, an artist of real talent. He quickly divined the possibilities of his new pupil, encouraged him, grounded him, and became a true friend and, in a certain sense, a second father to him.

After three years of study at this school, Henner left Altkirch, in accordance with M. Goutzwiller's advice, in order to go to Strassburg, where he entered the studio of the artist, Guérin. Here it was that he exchanged the pencil for the brush. From his first attempts he manifested a pronounced taste for oppositions of shadow and light, the latter acquiring greater vigour by force of contrast. Henner's first attempt at Strassburg was a copy of Heim's *Shepherd*, the original of which was burned in 1870, at the time of the fire resulting from the bombardment. But the copy remains, and bears witness to the painter's early love for sombre backgrounds, shot through with shimmerings of light. 27

During his vacations, which were passed at Bernwiller, Henner paid numerous visits to Basle and to Colmar, where he went for the purpose of studying the old German masters, Holbein, Schongauer, and Dürer. Holbein especially delighted and inspired him: he loved his honest, firm, frank line-work, no less than he appreciated the spirit of poetry with which the early master imbued all his models. What a schooling for a painter really enamoured of his art! In this ardent study of Holbein, Henner confirmed the opinion, that had already taken shape in his mind, that there is no good painting where there is not good drawing, and that no one has the right to claim to be a painter if he cannot lay his colours upon a solidly built foundation. The craftsman must always precede the artist. 28

In the case of Henner, at this time, the craftsmanship was perfect; nothing remained but to open a career for the artist. The young painter had faith, courage, and ambition; he dreamed of continuing his studies, of perfecting himself, of having other teachers. But these teachers were precisely what Strassburg could not furnish; and Paris, the great city, the centre of learning and of art, Paris was not far distant. What joy, if he could only go there! At this juncture, Guérin died. Having lost his master, Henner had nothing else to detain him in Strassburg. Accordingly, he put his trust in Providence, and, with his heart pulsing with hope, started on his way to the capital. 29

Henner arrived in Paris, light of purse but full of courage. He presented himself at the studio of Drolling, a compatriot, where he proceeded to toil like a galley-slave. In order to subsist, he gleaned here and there a little something by painting portraits; but, alas, these were rare and wretchedly underpaid! They by no means brought him a living; he experienced the keenest privations, and before long was unable to pay his monthly contribution of twenty francs towards the rental of the studio. What was he to do? Drolling was an artist with a big heart, and he loved his young pupil: Henner had only to confide in him, but he was too proud to admit his poverty. Should he appeal to his brothers? He did not even dream of doing so, for he knew how hard they found it, back there at home, to make both ends meet, even though they turned and returned the natal soil without respite. Accordingly, he chose the heroic part of returning to Alsace. There he passed the next two years, painting portraits and depriving himself even of necessities in order to economize and save up a fund. When his savings seemed to him sufficiently large, he set forth once more for Paris and returned to Drolling. The latter was stupefied at the progress Henner had made.

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"But why," he demanded, "why did you leave the studio like that, without a word of warning?"

Hereupon Henner confessed the cause for his departure; and on hearing his story, the tears rose up in the kind old artist's eyes, while at the same time he grew red with anger:

"People don't do such things," he said, "and they don't show false pride when they have a talent like yours; but instead, they compete for the Prix de Rome, and they win it!"

The Prix de Rome! A dream, which perhaps Henner had already vaguely glimpsed, but the realization of which seemed to him at that time too audacious and chimerical! That he, the little painter from Alsace, friendless and unknown, might obtain this supreme distinction which proclaims a talent! He did not dare to believe it, and yet his old master, Drolling, was an authority in art and not prodigal of his praise. Drolling did even better than encourage Henner, he made use of his friendship with the prefect of the department of the Lower Rhine to obtain an annuity for him. At the request of this official, the general council of the department granted Jean-Jacques Henner an annual pension of five hundred francs. This was very little, no doubt, but at least it meant his daily bread!

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Henner never had the pleasure of thanking Drolling; a rapid illness ended the life of the aged master in a few days, before the matter in question had been adjusted; but the young artist always retained a grateful memory of him.

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While awaiting the Prix de Rome, it was necessary to earn a living: for, as may easily be imagined, the meagre subsidy of five hundred francs could not suffice for all of Henner's needs. He had the good luck to make the acquaintance of a painter who worked mainly for Americans. He was a portrait painter and possessed a numerous clientèle from Yankee-land. As he could not keep up with the demand single-handed, he made a proposition to Henner that the latter should paint the coats, cravats, and linen of his "puppet-show," as he called them, reserving for himself the task of putting in the faces, mistrusting, no doubt, the competence of his collaborator. However humble the work, Henner accepted gratefully, for it enabled him to better his lot, to put aside a reserve fund, and even to come to the aid of the family left at home.

PLATE IV.--THE LITTLE WRITER (Petit Palais des Beaux-Arts)

This unkempt but earnest little worker, diligently bending over his copy-book, is a portrait of the artist's own nephew. This picture for a long time adorned the wall of his studio in the Place Pigalle.



Shortly afterwards, he won a medal from the École des Beaux-Arts, which gave him the right of free admission to the studio of the artist Picot.

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Henner was at this time twenty-seven years of age. He felt that he was now ready to enter the lists for the Prix de Rome. Boldly he set himself to his task. The subject assigned was as follows: *Adam and Eve Discovering the Body of Abel*. Henner's conception of the subject was admirable. Abel stretched at length under the shadow of dense foliage, and beside him, on her knees and heart-broken with grief, Eve suffers the terrible blow of divine malediction, while Adam, standing petrified with horror, seems not yet to have realized the immensity of his loss.

In this painting, the manner which is destined to become distinctive of this artist declares itself: a luminous profundity of landscape that emphasizes the whiteness of Abel's flesh. Although satisfied with his work, Henner was doubtful of the result. He trembled, for he had staked his entire future upon this picture. But he found unexpected encouragement from the little model who had posed for him and his competitors, in the character of Abel.

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"Have no doubt about it," the child told him, "you will win the prize. None of the others can compare with yours."

And Henner, only too glad to believe, went to work with redoubled zeal, to justify the admiration of his little model. His composition, however, when finished, proved to be incomplete: he had forgotten to include the club which Cain had used to strike down Abel. At the last moment he added this accessory so dexterously that the arrangement of the picture as a whole was undisturbed.

There was no discussion regarding the bestowal of the prize. Henner was unanimously declared the winner.

It is easy to imagine Henner's joy. Nevertheless a shadow dimmed it: that of not having been able to give his mother the final consolation of his triumph. That worthy and courageous woman died but shortly before, blessing and encouraging him almost with her final breath.

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Rome, that prodigious repository of art! with what reverential admiration the young artist approached her! What fascinated him from the start, offspring that he was of fair and undulating Alsace, was the Roman Campagna with its violent contrasts, its wide expanses ablaze with sunlight, cleft here and there with dense shadows, profound and nevertheless luminous. Here before his eyes, within reach of his palette, was not this the ideal landscape, such as his artistic instinct had taught him to prevision? Shadow and light clashing, interpenetrating, in order to form an imponderable and luminous dust, the light vivifying the shadow, the shadow sifting out the crudities of the light,—picture his joy at having foreseen all this instinctively, without having seen it, solely by his artistic intuition!

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The five years which he passed in Rome were one perpetual enchantment. The proof of this is found in his correspondence with M. Goutzwiller, his first drawing-master, who remained his best friend. One receives the impression, in reading it, that he lived in a continuous ecstasy, in a world of fairyland.

**PLATE V.--JOSEPH BARA
(Petit Palais des Beaux-Arts)**

This subject, consecrated to the glory of the young hero of the Revolution, had already been magnificently treated by David; none the less, Henner's Bara is not inferior to the other, and if perhaps it inspires a less degree of pity, there is something truly dramatic in the outstretched body, under the lowering sky.



And with what admiration and reverence he speaks of the great masters! How he loves them, and how well he understands the prodigious greatness of certain ones among them! The Venetians especially, those incomparable colourists, fired his ardour. He went to Venice, in order to worship them on the spot, in the presence of their works. But he was without prejudice; his taste was eclectic, like his own talent. His love for Titian and Giorgione did not prevent him from valuing Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci. He loved them all, because he understood them all and because in each one of them he recognized the marvellous gift of genius. But none the less he had one preference, and he could avow it unashamed, for its object was one of the most extraordinary of all masters of design and colour: Correggio. Everything in the work of that admirable artist fascinated him; his dexterity, which verges upon the miraculous, his prodigious foreshortenings, the magic of his palette, and above all his mastery of chiaroscuro, which no other artist, not even Rembrandt, has surpassed. This time Henner had found his true master, the one with whom he was destined to impregnate himself permanently, as regards the harmonious distribution of lights and shades.

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When he awoke from his contemplation of Correggio, it was in order to shut himself into his studio and feverishly endeavour to recapture with his own brush those exquisite colour tones that still dazzled his vision and possessed his spirit. What amazed him above all was the simplicity of means employed by the great masters to obtain all their effects, even those that seem the most complicated. "See," he said, "they have on their palettes only a few colours, and those the simplest: red, green, yellow, blue, black, and white! It is the modern painters who have invented the mixtures, that are so far removed from primitive simplicity!" Following the example of the earlier masters, Henner never employed any other colours than the simple ones. He always showed a marked aversion for mixed tints. His colours were always frank and sincere, even when toned down in order to avoid glaring and harsh effects. And it may justly be said of him that, "even on his palette his colours have already imprisoned light."

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His studies in Rome did not make him forgetful of his obligations: he worked very seriously at his future exhibits. His five years' sojourn was distinguished by five masterpieces. He sent successively to the Beaux-Arts *Christ in Prison* and *The Child with the Orange*, pictures of rare perfection, each of which received the award of a medal, and both of which were purchased by the museum at Colmar, which wished to possess the first works of the young Alsatian artist. The following year, he sent in *The Chaste Susannah*, now one of the treasures of the Luxembourg Museum. The model who posed for Susannah was named Chiara. She was very handsome and well known in the artist world of Rome, and possessed an education much above her station. She exhibited much pride in having

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served as model for such a masterpiece.

The picture was exhibited at the Salon of 1865, and, curiously enough, it by no means met with the success that it deserved. The critics, accustomed to a very different type of painting, did not understand this new and unfamiliar method. Théophile Gautier was the only one who proclaimed its merit. It is only fair to add that his opinion was easily worth all the others. "It is not alone," he wrote, "the style and beauty of line that form the distinction of this beautiful Jewess, but also and more especially the fine instinct for colour. This is no statue that is bathing here, it is a very genuine woman."

At this same Salon, Henner exhibited two portraits of superior workmanship: that of Schnets, director of the École de Rome, and that of M. Joyau, architect of the same school.

In 1865, Henner returned to Paris and installed himself in the house in the Place Pigalle which he occupied during the rest of his life. This house is full of memories. It has sheltered, either successively or at the same time, many illustrious painters: Jules and Victor Dupré, Théodore Rousseau, Puvis de Chavannes, Boldini, etc. Henner occupied the lower floor to begin with, but later, after the death of Pils, who had been living on the second floor, he took the latter's studio, because the light was better.

And, from the day of his return to Paris, Henner entered upon a life of unremitting toil and fecundity that never ceased to cause astonishment. Few painters have left behind them such a volume of productions; his genre pictures, his landscapes peopled with nymphs are innumerable; as to his portraits, women's portraits especially, it would require far more ample limits than those of the present study merely to give a list of them. And what evokes genuine admiration is the fact that it is impossible, in the midst of this extraordinary multiplicity of widely varied works, to find a single one that is not evidently equal to his best. And this is because Henner, notwithstanding his facility, bestowed an infinite conscientiousness upon even the least important of his paintings. He regarded it as dishonesty to produce merely for the sake of producing, or, to sum it up in a word, to do fake work.

Indefatigable workman that he was, Henner allowed himself few diversions; his life was as strictly ordered as that of a monk. Always an early riser, he devoted his mornings to his landscapes and genre paintings, and his afternoons to his portraits. From four until seven he was in the habit of receiving a few friends or would bury himself in a book, for he was a great reader. It was an exceptional thing for him to dine away from home, and when he went out it was always for the purpose of visiting the Louvre or some exhibit of paintings. As a matter of fact, he was never happy away from his studio, that celebrated studio which he had fitted up with so much taste and magnificence. It was there, in that artistic and sumptuous setting, that he executed those innumerable works, whose magnificent flowering we are about to follow, year by year. It will be impossible for us to cite them all; we must content ourselves with calling attention only to the more remarkable.

In 1865, Henner exhibited his *Biblis metamorphosed into a Spring*, one of his most beautiful paintings. In the midst of a sombre landscape, the dazzling nudity of the nymph forms a luminous spot, but the contrasting tones harmonize in a sort of fine and golden atmosphere, blending into the profound green of the foliage, the porcelain blue of the sky, and the resplendent whiteness of the flesh. And what simplicity of means he has used to produce this result! Henner had profited from the lessons of the great masters; and he was never to forget them.

The following year came his *Study of a Young Girl*. This time it was no longer under leafy canopies that the painter chose to place his model, but in the presence of the immensity of the blue sea. The success of this painting was very marked and it earned the artist a medal of the first class. But the painter himself was as severe towards his own work as the critics had been flattering; he was not satisfied with it, and when the canvas was once again back in his studio, he destroyed it. What a pity that such a work should have been lost, but also what a fine example, and what a rare one, of professional conscientiousness and integrity!

The work exhibited the following year suffered the same fate. In one of those crises of discontent which Henner, always severe towards himself, frequently passed through, he once again ripped up his own work, the charming painting known as *The Toilet*, which nevertheless had received nothing but praise while at the Salon.

The public, by which I mean the enlightened public, had now come to appreciate the talent of the young artist. His reputation was established, and orders began to come in. Not that he had yet acquired that world-wide celebrity which was destined to come later, but people were beginning to understand the originality of his art, which at first had provoked so much discussion.

PLATE VI.--THE COMTESSE DIANE (Luxembourg Museum)

This fine portrait of the Comtesse Diane (Mme. de Beausacq) was executed by Henner at the request of the poet, Sully-Prudhomme, and bequeathed to the Louvre. But it was necessary that it should first remain for the prescribed period in the Luxembourg, since no picture may be admitted into the Louvre until ten years after the death of its author.



Besides, Henner was too passionately devoted to his art to concern himself about money. He always showed the greatest disinterestedness. Prosperity came to him, ample prosperity, but he did not seek it. It was the natural recompense of this amazing workman, happily supplemented by the most extraordinary powers of production. There were instances when he produced in the space of a few hours pictures that he sold for twenty-five and thirty thousand francs.

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Wealth, however, did not in any way modify either his habits or his character. He remained throughout his life just as simple, just as gentle, and just as laborious. This is perhaps the right moment at which to quote the charming word-portrait of this good and kindly man, drawn by M. Claude Vento, who knew him well:

"If, by his nature as well as by the vigour of his genius, Henner deserves to be compared to the Masters of the past, his very physique suggests that he is a reincarnation of some one of those great artists of the Renaissance, whose mould had seemingly been broken. Robust, squarely built, broad of shoulder, with energetic head planted on a rather stout neck, a countenance strong yet gentle, with features strongly marked, and hair surmounted by a black velvet cap, does not Henner as a matter of fact, clad in his velvet jacket over a flannel shirt, remind us of the portrait of Holbein who was his first inspiration? His whole personality bears the stamp of frankness and of kindness, a kindness possessing a rather rough exterior, but actually very rare in quality, as you may see in the depths of his pale blue eyes, as limpid and clear as the eyes of a little child. There is an element of naïveté in his sincere face, through which, however, a deep shrewdness penetrates, a kindness that is not free from mockery, when his alert wit detects insincerity, whereupon, behind a mocking smile, irony leaps to his lips, like fine and delicate arrows, but all the more stinging for that. But this is not customary. Although, like all men who have had to struggle, Henner is not readily expansive and guards himself from the importunate, by his somewhat cold manner, what a hearty hand-grasp, loyal and true, for his real friends, what a reassuring smile, lighting up his virile features, when sympathy knocks at his door! With what unceremonious cordiality he comes in person to answer the bell and open the door of his studio to the expected visitor! As a usual rule, Henner talks but little. He listens more than he talks, and is naturally given to reflection. But whatever he says is to the point and is well worth listening to. If in his presence the conversation chances to turn upon art or literature or any other lofty subject, but more especially art, then the passion latent in him all of a sudden bursts forth and reveals itself, just as a fire suddenly blazes up from beneath a pile of ashes, and all the more violently because it has been so long smouldering. At such times his language is vivid, highly coloured, vigorous, and full of conviction. The words come to his lips without effort and flow in a rapid stream. And the listener realizes that he is in the presence of a truthful nature, ardent and resolute, a conscientious judge and a great artist, whose enthusiasms are sincere and whose will is strong and tenacious."

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Here we have the complete picture of the man, discreet, laborious, modest, an enemy of noise and notoriety, and revealing himself to the public only through his signature unfailingly appended to the lower margin of his immortal canvases.

The series of them is imposing. At the Exposition of 1867, Henner was represented by *The Chaste Susannah*, *The Young Bather Asleep*, *The Reclining Woman*, an admirable masterpiece now in the collection of the Mulhouse museum, and seven portraits which bore witness to the artist's prodigious fecundity and to the infinite variety of his talent.

In 1869, he exhibited only two paintings at the Salon, but they were two gems: *The Woman on the Black Divan*, whose nudity contrasts in dazzling fashion with the sombre setting of the velvet couch on which she reposes; and *The Little Writer*, a charming portrait of a child, who happens to be the artist's own nephew, diligently bending over his desk. A [reproduction](#) of this latter picture will be found among the plates of the present study.

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The following year, in 1870, *The Alsatian Woman* was exhibited at the Salon. It was a personification of his native land, Alsace, that he loved so dearly, and that he represented in this

picture in the form of a vigorous peasant woman with a jovial face, who carries a basket filled with apples, symbolic of abundance and happiness. At that time, the storm had not burst over that ill-fated land; and there was nothing to cause him to foresee it; the Alsatian woman is laughing and untroubled, unaware of her terrible destiny.

What a contrast was afforded by his next work, *Alsace*, which the misfortunes of France inspired the ardently French and Alsatian soul of the artist to produce! What emotion emanates from the woman clad in mourning, whose features bear the traces of the grief she has suffered and of the mutilation that has taken place! Nevertheless, ravaged as it is by sorrow, her face still radiates a serene pride and an unquenchable hope: the hope of a triumphal revenge and of the return of France. Henner, alas, died without having seen the fulfilment of the miracle awaited by him with so much fervour. It is easy to imagine the success which greeted this picture at the Salon of 1871. Stirred to their inmost soul, the visitors piously took off their hats and felt a wave of the artist's patriotic fire pass through them. Gambetta desired to see the painting, was delighted with it, and promptly purchased it.

After the war, Henner continued, as previously, to pass his annual vacations at Bernwiller; he could not bring himself to dispense wholly with his native air; and yet what sadness was now entailed in returning home, and how changed and wretched he found it under the suspicious and harassing administration of the conquerors! None the less he could still revisit the companions of his childhood, his brothers and his nephews, whom he delighted to receive at all hours in the pretty little brick house that he had had built on the family property.

In 1872 he exhibited *The Idyll*; it proved to be the biggest success that he had yet achieved. Two nymphs are beside a fountain, as night descends; one of the two is playing on a flute, the other with one hand resting on her hip, as she leans with her other on the fountain rim, listening. Both are nude, with that warm, vibrant nudity that awakens memories of the flesh of Giorgione's women, in his *Rural Concert*, and both are enveloped in the waves of their tawny tresses.

This magnificent painting earned Henner a medal of honour which was bestowed upon him by acclamation. It is at present in the Museum of the Luxembourg, where it forms one of the most valued treasures.

To 1874 belong *The Good Samaritan*, also now in the Luxembourg, and *The Magdalen in the Desert*, which belongs to the museum of Toulouse. These two pictures, following such a long succession of successful canvases, earned Henner the Legion of Honour. The modest artist was profoundly touched by this distinction, which nevertheless he so well merited.

PLATE VII.--A NAIAD (Luxembourg Museum)

This is one of the most beautiful of Henner's paintings. What grace there is in the outstretched body, what suppleness and vigour in those long and slender limbs, how much beauty in the face, and what a voluptuous abandonment throughout that white and amber body in its entirety! The luminous and profound landscape give an admirable impression of a warm and peaceful twilight.



The following year, Henner exhibited [The Naiad](#). The nymph, quite nude, is lying, with one leg extended, the other partly flexed, upon the grass, beside a stream in which the azure of the sky is mirrored. She leans her head upon her upraised left arm, and her hair full of golden gleams forms a diadem of fulvous light around her. The voluptuous mouth is half open and the eyes have a hint of caresses floating in their liquid depths. The transparent whiteness of the flesh seems to sink into the soft carpeting of dense verdure, while under the massive density of the great trees a discreet and subtle light penetrates the entire landscape, softening the shadows, refining the atmosphere, and caressing with its soft radiance the beautiful outstretched body of the naiad. It was once again the Luxembourg that secured possession of this incomparable work.

In 1876, Henner essayed an entirely different subject, and a much severer one, which he nevertheless treated without in any way modifying his manner: *The Dead Christ*. Always an earnest Christian, Henner loved religious subjects and he bestowed upon those that he painted all his artistic power and all the fervour of his faith. In this picture, he has proved himself the equal of the

greatest masters, and he need have no fear of challenging comparison with the most illustrious interpreters of the Crucifixion.

There is still another subject of a religious nature that Henner undertook the following year: *The Head of St. John the Baptist*, a work of striking realism. At the same Salon, that of 1877, he also exhibited a pagan subject, *Evening*, representing a woman couched upon the grass and viewed from behind, completely enveloped in the masses of her red-gold hair.

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Next came *The Naiads*, whose sculpture-like silhouettes are profiled against the silvered background of a superbly lighted landscape. It was this canvas which inspired Armand Sylvestre to write a very charming poem, in which the following lines are included:

By dreaming waters under sleeping skies,
Where nature's bowl entraps the widening stream,
A troupe of naiads, hid from mortal eyes,
Toss to the breeze their tresses' golden sheen.

At the Salon of 1878, Henner was represented by several pictures. To begin with, there was *Holbein's Wife and Children*, the artist's tribute to the memory of the by-gone master who had been the source of his first enthusiasm and first inspiration: furthermore, *The Young Girl in Black* and *The Lady with the Umbrella*.

In 1879 came *The Eclogue*, a composition of classic harmony and beauty. With elbows leaning on the margin of a well, a nymph of resplendent beauty stands upright in an attitude of reverie. In front of her, a companion is bending over the mirror-like surface of a stream which crosses the landscape, and her glowing hair envelops her wholly, like a mantle of gold. The sombre verdure of the great trees emphasizes the dazzling whiteness of the two female forms; above and beyond the foliage, a glimpse of blue sky adds its glad and luminous note.

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We must not forget *The Magdalen*, which was the most widely discussed work exhibited at this Salon. The subject was one of which the artist was especially fond; he treated it a number of times, and it almost seemed as though he wanted to prove the variability of a brush that never repeated itself and of a talent that was continually renewed. This time the penitent of the Gospel story is crouching in the entrance to a cave, in an attitude of prayer. In the half shadow cast by the overhanging rock, the body of the Magdalen radiates brightness, while ripples of light shimmer through her golden tresses. This beautiful picture is to be seen to-day in the Petit Palais, in the room reserved for the works of Henner.

64

Each succeeding year now brought new masterpieces and new triumphs. Two paintings were shown in the Salon of 1880: *Sleep* and *The Fountain*. The first of these represents a young girl, almost a child, sunken in profound sleep. Around the face, in its golden frame of hair, the artist has diffused an aureole of peace, candour, and innocence which brings to mind some legendary saint. Rarely has the artist achieved such perfection of line and such beauty of expression. The painting was purchased by the Prince de Broglie.

In *The Fountain* we behold a woman, beautiful with the beauty of red gold, like all of Henner's women. She is resting her hand upon the margin of a well, and seems to be gazing at her own reflection in the water.

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This same Salon also includes *Andromeda in Chains*, which belongs to-day to Mme. Raffalowitz.

From time to time Henner reverted to religious paintings, for which, after the fashion of the great masters of the past, he always retained a marked fondness. Thus it happened that he exhibited at the Salon of 1881 a *St. Jerome*, a subject all the more venturesome to paint because many of the most illustrious artists, such as Dürer, Tintoretto, and Veronese, had treated it before him. Yet Henner might well challenge comparison with these redoubtable predecessors, and this picture, now in the Luxembourg, is numbered among his best.

The Spring, which figured at the same Salon, inevitably challenges comparison with the same subject formerly treated by Ingres. Employing wholly different means, Henner achieved the same degree of perfection as that attained by the illustrious author of *The Odalisque*. In Ingres' picture of *The Spring*, the flesh of the young girl has the freshness of some delicate and fragile fruit; in that of Henner's, it has the velvety savour of a fruit that is fully ripe. Both paintings show the same masterly science of line-work, the same impeccable sureness of execution, and also the same profound sense of virginal chastity in the nude. Henner's *Spring* was purchased by an American for eleven thousand dollars (55,000 francs). This is one of the highest prices ever paid for the work of a living painter.

66

In 1882 came *Bara*, of which we give a [reproduction](#) in the present volume, and which is now to be seen in the Petit Palais. This was still another subject which had been previously treated, and by no less a master than David! Both painters were equally felicitous in rendering the charming youthfulness of the small hero who fell so gloriously for his country. A comparison of the two works is all the more pleasurable because one discovers that, however dissimilar they may be, they express the same appreciation of classic beauty and the same reverence for form.

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In 1883 we have *The Woman Reading*, a dazzling poem in blond flesh that brings to mind Correggio's *Magdalen Reading*, now contained in the Munich collection. In contrast with the opulence of the above portrait, we have next a countenance of remarkable gentleness, ideal in its expression of purity, in the picture entitled *The Nun*. She is quite young and quite fair, and she is kneeling upon the pavement in prayer, while her pale girlish face emerges from the sombre frame

of her black garb, like an immaculate lily overgrown with weeds. This time Henner had surpassed himself; he had interpreted with inimitable strokes the beauty of renunciation and the purity of an ecstatic life.

This Salon was one of the most glorious that the great artist ever knew.

Nevertheless, it was the very next year that he exhibited *The Weeping Nymph*, his magnificent nymph prostrate upon the ground, sobbing with her face in her hands and her whole body writhing with anguish. After this came *Fabiola*, that superb, virgin profile crowned with a red cap, which the engraver's art has spread throughout the world in the form of millions of reprints, until its renown is universal.

In 1886, some more *Nymphs* and *The Orphan Girl*, treated in the same manner as *Fabiola*, and forming in a certain sense a companion piece.

Then came *The Creole*, a fascinating woman's head, done in warm flesh tones, amber-tinted, keenly alive; a picture which the State promptly acquired. Then, next in order, *Herodiade*, a young girl of fifteen, or thereabouts, clad in a clinging scarlet tunic, her black eyes gleaming with a fathomless light.

**PLATE VIII.--THE MAGDALEN WITH THE CRUCIFIX
(Petit Palais des Beaux-Arts)**

This is a subject which Henner treated several times. The Magdalen here reproduced is, beyond all else, a beautiful and robust creature, whose repentance finds little testimony in her features that are barely clouded by a faint shadow of melancholy. Yet it is difficult to conceive of a more delicious study of a woman.



We need not go further with our catalogue of Henner's works; it would only necessitate a continual repetition of the same praises and monotonous descriptions of pictures that the whole world knows, at least from the engravings of them. Up to the end of his life, the artist continued to make regular and methodical progress; up to the end, his talent preserved its vigour and its youth. It even seems as though in his latest works his light had acquired more transparency, his foliage a more vibrant warmth, his flesh tones a more dazzling splendour.

In the course of time, his success had increased, his reputation had become world-wide. Americans outbid one another for his pictures, and purchased them at fabulous prices. And together with wealth came honours. I mean the only kind of honours that would have been welcomed by this modest and laborious artist, who sought neither the hubbub of vulgar notoriety, nor the glitter of official functions.

But, with his passionate devotion to painting, which had formed the one ideal of his life, he was not displeased to see honour paid, through himself as the medium, to an art that he had constantly striven to practise with the utmost dignity and the profoundest love. With undisguised gladness he accepted the successive decorations bestowed upon him in the Order of the Legion of Honour. And the son of the Bernwiller gardener experienced quite a legitimate pride when the unanimous appreciation of his peers opened the doors of the Institute to him.

It is impossible to speak of Henner, and yet pass over in silence his success as a portrait painter, in which capacity he was equal, if not superior, to the painter of nymphs and Magdalens.

In his portrait work Henner was first of all the portrayer of women, as indeed, throughout his life, he had been in all his paintings.

There was no dearth of models. They came to him in throngs, and his studio in the Place Pigalle witnessed a procession of the most magnificent beauties of France and the world at large. Henner, however, was never a flattering portrait painter, nor even a complaisant one. He had too much respect for himself and for his art to trade upon his professional integrity; he was too fervent a worshipper of nature to distort it, or even to paraphrase it. His portraits are literally portraits, in the highest sense of the word; I mean that they are faithful copies of the person represented, and that no trace of adulation could be found in a single one of them. But he excelled in extracting from the physiognomy of his model that one intimate note which each one of us conceals within himself, and that is now and then betrayed upon our features in a fugitive yet unmistakable gleam. It is this hidden note, this inner flame, this latent nobility, this moral beauty which Henner had the peculiar gift of divining and interpreting.

Is it at all surprising, with such advantages, that Henner's portraits are of such superior workmanship that they are almost always masterpieces? Unfortunately, it is impossible here to enter upon an extensive study of Henner the portrait painter; we must content ourselves with citing the most celebrated of his portraits of women: Mme. Paul Dubois, Mme. Bonard, Mme. Sédille, a charming countenance, seen full-face, the black shawl throwing her rich beauty into relief; Mme. Jules Ferry, Mme. Scheurer-Kestner, Mme. Charles Hayem, Mme. Koechlin-Schwartz, Mlle. Formigé, Mme. Pasteur and Mlle. Pasteur, the magnificent portrait of Miss Eldin, whose regal blond beauty is framed in a bewitching Gainsborough hat; Mlle. Marcille, Mlle. Mosenthal, Mlle. Sédille, Mlle. Gentien, an admirable symphony of black tones, in which all the accessories, the gloves and fan, are of sombre colour; this portrait is one of Henner's best; Mme. Eumont, whose black garments form a curious contrast to her powdered hair; then, three masterpieces: the portraits of the three daughters of Mme. Porgès, and also that of Mme. Porgès herself with her youngest child; the Comtesse d'Ideville, whose red robe forms a warm and luminous contrast to the sombre background of the picture; Her Imperial Highness, the Countess of Eu, daughter of Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil; the Princesse de Broglie, née Say, daughter of the millionaire refiner; Mme. Fournier-Sarlevèze, a fascinating woman, who died prematurely; Mme. Raffalowitz, Mme. Oulman, Mme. Henry Fouquier, and her charming daughter, Mlle. Fouquier, Mme. Rodrigues, Mlle. Leroux, Mlle. de Morell, Mme. Fougère-Dubourg, Mme. Kutner; Mme. Daniel Dollfus, portrayed standing; the Marquise de Mosges; Mme. Hippolyte Adam; Mme. de Rute, Mme. Jules Siegfried, Mme. Duplay, Mme. Fabre, Mme. Peltreau, the Baroness Brincard; Mlle. Hoschedé; Mlle. Chanzy, Mlle. Fernande Dubourg; Mme. Herzog, Mme. Silhal, Mme. Brossard, Mme. Loreau, Mme. de Crépy, Mme. Raphael, Mme. Jules Walfrey, Mme. Charras, Mme. Marochetti, Mme. Diémer, Mme. Carmian, Mme. Monthier, in black and with black drapery over her shoulders, Mme. de Beausacq (the Comtesse Diane), a beautiful portrait of which we give a [reproduction](#); this portrait was executed by Henner at the request of Sully-Prudhomme and bequeathed to the Louvre; but it has not yet been transferred to that great national museum; it is still in the Luxembourg, and is regarded as one of its choicest treasures.

Furthermore, mention should be made of Mlle. Valentine Edmond About, Mlle. Brincard, Mme. Jules Claretie, the Comtesse Kessler, one of the master's most successful portraits and one that he obtained from a single sitting; Mme. Shoppey, a fascinating Creole from the island of Bourbon, whose profile has an ideal beauty that inspired Henner to produce a veritable masterpiece; he was no less successful in portraying Mme. Noetzelin, another exquisite exotic beauty, whose languid indolence and captivating charm he has rendered with infinite vigour and grace.

But one of his most beautiful portraits is that of Mme. Karekehia, the mother of Nubar Pacha, who, although quite advanced in age, is represented in a charming pose that emphasizes her natural attractions. Nowhere else perhaps did Henner rise to such a height, or obtain such a degree of truth in his interpretation of a human physiognomy.

And how many other portraits there are, equally beautiful, equally powerful, if only we might cite them all!

Painter of women though he was, Henner did not refuse as a settled policy to paint men, but it was difficult to make up his mind to do so. Not that he showed less ability in his portraiture of men. It was simply that it cost him something to renounce, even temporarily, the cult of feminine beauty, to which he had dedicated himself. He loved to make rays of light play harmoniously over blond flesh, over silken fabrics, over draperies; and the uniformity of masculine garments does not lend itself to this sort of magic. None the less, he produced a few portraits of men which are absolutely remarkable; portraits of personal friends, for the most part, which he painted with a solicitude that makes itself felt: such are the portraits of Jules Claretie, of Dr. Leroy, of the painter Parrot, of the sculptor Paul Dubois, the poet Sully-Prudhomme, of the publisher Georges Charpentier, of General Chanzy. Henner also painted a little portrait of Pasteur, which was never shown at the Salon, but is nevertheless one of the most keenly alive and most perfect of his works.

It would also be only fitting to consider Henner's work from the particular point of view of landscape painting which occupies so large a place in his pictures; but the circumscribed space of the present study does not permit of this.

Henner aged peacefully in the tranquillity of his studio and the harmonious regularity of an existence consecrated to labour and to art. In 1900, at the time of the Universal Exposition, he obtained one of the four grand prizes bestowed by the judges upon the greatest artists.

In this life of Henner's, unmarked by any extraordinary event, everything is as limpid and as clear as a woodland spring whose transparent waters flow peacefully, slipping noiselessly under cover of the moss. Until the end, Henner retained his modesty, his natural simplicity, his aversion to notoriety; and when in 1905 he died, there was no dissenting voice in the general praise of his character and his talent.

Henner possessed the rare privilege, not of having created a type, but of having left upon contemporary art the imprint of his powerful personality. We are also in debt to him for a return to the dignity of the great classic types, to a beauty of form achieved in accordance with an original and rejuvenated conception. Like Puvis de Chavannes, he has taught us to appreciate the majestic harmony of antique composition, and also, like him, he has given us an example of a richness of colour carried to the culminating point by the simplest of means. Steeped in classicism beneath its brilliant exterior, grounded on a mastery of line-work, underneath the gleaming colours, Henner's art has broken down all opposition, silenced all criticism, and evoked universal admiration because it unites these two masterly qualities which form the basis of imperishable painting: conscientiousness and genius.

Transcriber's Note:

The plates and their captions have been moved to paragraph breaks.
Minor printer's errors have been corrected, but variant and irregular spellings have been retained.

[Page 23](#): "extraordinary intensity of life" replaced with "extraordinary intensity of life"

[Page 77](#): "culte of feminine beauty" replaced with "cult of feminine beauty"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HENNER ***

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