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Metaphysics Investment Archaeology



# ETCHING & ETCHERS

BY

PHILIP GILBERT HAMERTON,

AUTHOR OF THE 'INTELLECTUAL LIFE,' ETC.



WITH ETCHINGS BY THE AUTHOR.

BOSTON:

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

1905.



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**UNIVERSITY PRESS:**  
**JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.**

**SEVENTH EDITION.**





**W**REET gij wat etsen is?—Het is flaneeren  
Op 't koper; 't is in 't zomerschemeruur  
Met malsche vedelsnaren fantaseeren.  
't Zijn hartsgeheimtjes, die ons de natuur  
Vertrouwt, bij 't dwalen op de hei, bij 't staren  
In zee, naar 't wolkjen in het zwerk, of waar  
In't biezig meer wat eendjes spelevaren;  
't Is duivendons en klauw van d' adelaar.  
Homeros in een nootje, en tien geboden  
Op 't vlak eens stuivertjes;—een wensch, een zucht,  
Gevat in fijn geciseleerde oden.  
Een ras gegrepen beeldje in vogelvlucht.  
't Is op 't gevoelig goudkleur koper malen  
Met d' angel eener wesp en 't fulpen stof  
Der vlinderwiek, gegloeid van zonnestralen;  
De punt der naald die juist ter snede trof  
Wat in des kunstnaars rijke dichterziel  
Uit fantasie en leven samenviel.

**C. VOSMAER.**

**Know ye what etching is? It is to ramble  
On copper ; in a summer twilight's hour  
To let sweet Fancy fiddle tunefully.  
It is the whispering from Nature's heart,  
Heard when we wander on the moor, or gaze  
On the sea, on fleecy clouds of heaven, or at  
The rushy lake when p'ayful ducks are splashing ;  
It is the down of doves, the eagle's claw ;  
'Tis Homer in a nutshell, ten commandments  
Writ on a penny's surface ; 'tis a wish,  
A sigh, comprised in finely-chiselled odes,  
A little image in its bird's-flight caught.  
It is to paint on the soft gold-hued copper  
With sting of wasp and velvet of the wings  
Of butterfly, by sparkling sunbeams glowed. •  
Even so the etcher's needle, on its point,  
Doth catch what in the artist-poet's mind  
Reality and fancy did create.**

*Translated by* **HOLDA.**





TO

FRANCIS SEYMOUR HADEN.

**H**ERE is a book written to increase the public interest in an art we both love ; and I dedicate it to you because, in the more difficult way of practical demonstration, you have well helped the same cause. It may be a useful service to take a pen and tell a somewhat indifferent, or otherwise interested public, how great an art etching is ; but it is a far higher achievement to take an etching-needle and compel attention by the beauty of actual performance. The reception your etchings met with—a reception unprecedented in the history of the art—must have been gratifying to your feelings as an artist ; but I am sure that I interpret your sentiments justly, in supposing that you felt a still keener and nobler pleasure than that which attends any merely personal success. You have the satisfaction of knowing that a great art, hitherto grievously and ignorantly neglected, has, by your labours, received an appreciable increase of consideration ; and that, as a consequence of the celebrity of your works, many have become interested in etching, who, before their appearance, were scarcely even aware of its existence. It is rather with reference to this result of your labours than to their purely

artistic value that I dedicate this book to you, though, at the same time, it may be right to add briefly here, what I have said more at length elsewhere, that of all modern etchers you seem to be the most completely in unison with the natural tendencies of the art. How much this implies, and what warm approval may be expressed in this moderate way, the reader will see elsewhere.

## P R E F A C E.

**T**HE first edition of this work has been for some time exhausted, and copies of it are only to be had occasionally from dealers in rare books, at fancy prices. In the present edition the book takes its permanent form, for it is stereotyped, and care has therefore been taken about the revision of it. Besides revising what was already written, I have brought my work down to the latest dates by adding notices of the most recent etchings of importance, and by explaining the newest practical improvements in the craft of etching itself which are of proved utility and accepted by eminent workmen. The present edition contains, indeed, more than two hundred pages of entirely new matter, so that it may be considered as a supplement to the first. There are also eight illustrations which did not appear in the first edition.

It is necessary to give a few words of explanation about the plates. The book was originally illustrated with impressions from original old and modern coppers which were got together temporarily by dint of good luck, considerable expense, and infinite personal trouble. It was impossible to purchase them, and when we had printed the number of copies necessary for our first edition, we were obliged by our contract to return the plates to their owners. We could not, if we



would, get those coppers together again, and it has been thought desirable that the present edition should be cheaper than it could have been with magnificently abundant illustration. It was therefore finally decided that the etchings should now be of minor importance, and that they should be given not at all as "embellishments," but simply to make the text more intelligible. As an instance of this may be mentioned the plate from Turner, copied from the "Little Devil's Bridge." It does not exhibit Turner's power of composition, for it is only part of a subject ; it cannot show his mastery over light and shade, for the mezzotint which gave the light and shade is omitted ; but it exhibits Turner's way of drawing and biting his organic lines, and that is why it is given in this volume. For this particular purpose it is positively more useful than the original, since in the original the lines are much obscured by dark mezzotinting, which was applied to the plate by Charles Turner after J M W Turner had etched it. To make the lines very plain, the printer has been told to print as simply and clearly as possible, merely that the reader might see what Turner's lines were like. The etchings from other masters are in almost every instance portions of plates selected for some special reason, and not to make the book look pretty. It was suggested that by one of the remarkable new photographic processes sufficiently accurate copies of etchings might have been given at a cheap rate ; but it seemed that in a book of a practical kind like this it was very desirable that the reader should have plates really produced by the processes of etching which are described and so often alluded to in its pages. I therefore took the trouble to copy portions of plates by various



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masters (a very heavy piece of work, though the result of it looks so slight); and as students of etching can learn more from real plates, when they know how they have been bitten, than from any quantity of vague verbal explanation about getting lines "dark" or "pale," I have also published my own private registers of biting. Reviewers sometimes say very unkind things of me for giving explanations of this technical kind, which they neither know nor care anything about, but art students write to express their gratitude, and only beg that the explanations may be made still clearer and more precise. Between the two I cannot hesitate. The satisfaction of being in some measure useful to real workers is so substantial a satisfaction, that it far outweighs any momentary annoyance which may be inflicted by the sneers of an ill-natured reviewer who may happen to be vexed with me for knowing more about my own subject than he possibly can know. At the same time hearty thanks are offered to many critics who helped this book when it first appeared, and whose cordial expressions of approbation no doubt largely contributed to its success.

It was written originally with a view to certain purposes of a kind that may be called permanent, and others which were only temporary. I wished to help in transmitting the good and sound tradition of etching—this was the permanent purpose ; but I wished also to exercise some influence of a kind that might be practically useful on the work of the younger men at the present time ; and this, in a certain sense, was a temporary purpose. The best way to do this seemed to be an outspoken criticism of some recent etchers who had influence



because they were celebrated painters. It is a popular error to imagine that because a man can paint cleverly he must also be able to etch. The knowledge of a painter has usually, it is true, been the magazine of material from which eminent etchers have selected, by a high faculty of choice, what they put into their etchings ; but when this selecting faculty is absent, the knowledge of a painter ceases to be available in this art. I have myself actually seen accomplished painters trying what they could do on the copper, and seen them puzzled, uncertain, feeble, though they were anything but feeble with the brush. "He has painted many a picture," says one who *can* etch, of a painter such as I have just alluded to, "and by dint of searching with opaque materials has even earned the reputation, such as it is, of 'finish.' For the first time he finds himself under the necessity of considering every stroke. He begins, and has soon made a hundred where a master would have made one ; but he goes on, and at the expense of many qualities which as a painter he could have held dear, he arrives at last. 'How finished !' says one ; 'How worthless !' another—for the last knows what the first, possibly, does not—that it is one thing to cover a plate with work until the effect has been obtained, and another to obtain it with little, or rather with the appearance of little. Etching is not painting, but an art (though in close alliance with painting) in all respects distinct. He who so mistakes its end, intention, and scope, as to overlay his work till all brilliancy and transparence have gone out of it, is confounding two things, and only labouring to produce opacity." Holding these opinions, I criticised some painters severely as etchers, whilst admiring their pictures very heartily for their



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own merits ; but some of the severer of these criticisms are withdrawn from the present edition, as the book has now taken its permanent form, and it is not desirable to perpetuate much criticism of that kind, however just and necessary it may be when first written. Thus the chapter on David Roberts is withdrawn : it was inserted originally because his very poor and unintelligent work in etching had been injudiciously held up as a model. Mr. Holman Hunt also came in for a page of criticism severe enough to convey the impression, as I learned afterwards, of some personal vengeance or animosity. As it happens that I have always felt a great respect for Mr. Hunt's strength of resolution and honesty of purpose in his career as a painter, and also for his accomplished skill (without mentioning his higher gifts, which cannot be dealt with in a parenthesis), I am glad to put an end to this misunderstanding by withdrawing the page in question. A friend and correspondent, who is himself one of the finest etchers in Europe, told me that he thought highly of a small etching by Mr. Holman Hunt, representing an Egyptian scene with the pyramids, and the reader may rely upon his opinion.

A well-known English Academician, not an acquaintance of mine, wrote to me to offer a piece of unasked-for advice, which was to avoid mentioning living men in my writings, because, he said, "it savours of cliqueism." In this, however, as in other matters, a writer must exercise his own judgment. Much of the sort of usefulness aimed at in the present volume would not be attained if living artists were omitted from its pages. My work with reference to living men consists almost always in drawing public attention to their merits, and it seems



better that this should be done for them whilst they are alive, and can reap the benefit of any increase of reputation, than after they are dead, when praise will be of no use to them. I belong to no clique whatever, and I never have belonged to any clique. Most of my work has been done in a foreign country, and when in London or Paris I have generally been much too busily occupied to have time for the cultivation of cliqueish sentiments. The volume the reader holds in his hand is indeed a sufficient reply to such an accusation as this, for it praises with equal warmth etchers of the most opposite qualities and schools when their work has seemed to be good in its own kind.

Another accusation which has been to some extent circulated both in the English and American press may deserve some words of answer. It has been said of my writings that they exercise a bad influence by exalting mechanism above mind, because they happen to contain a good deal of technical information. It is quite true that technical matters always seem to me extremely interesting, as they do to all who are not prevented by sheer ignorance from entering into such questions ; all artists delight in them, and even in their difficulties, as mathematicians delight in their problems, and chess-players in theirs. But I have never regarded technical skill as anything more than a means of mental expression, and I have at all times earnestly and energetically maintained the supreme importance of mental power in art, and as energetically condemned the base mechanical skill which is uninformed by noble thought and feeling. Those critics, therefore, who have accused me of exalting mechanism above



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mind say what is contrary to the truth, and are guilty either of unpardonable presumption in speaking of a writer they have not read, or else of yet more unpardonable dishonesty in wilfully misrepresenting him. My teaching about art subordinates everything to the mind of the artist, even that truth to nature which a modern superstition regards as if it were something sacred. The following extracts from writings which have been before the public for years are sufficient evidence of this, and the reader will find more recent matter in the present volume, especially in the chapter on the Revival of Etching in England, which maintains and confirms the same principles.

“The art of etching has no mechanical attractiveness. If an etching has no meaning it can interest nobody; if its significant lines are accompanied by many insignificant ones, their value is neutralised.”—*Etching and Etchers*, book i. ch. iii.

“A great etching is the product of a grandly-constituted mind; every stroke of it has value exactly proportionate to the mental capacity of the artist; so that a treatise on etching is necessarily a treatise on the mental powers of great men.”—*Etching and Etchers*, book i. ch. vii.

“Above all, it should be well understood that etching is not, as some imagine, a fit pastime for small minds; but that, on the contrary, its great glory is to offer the means of powerful and summary expression to the largest.”—*Etching and Etchers*, book i. ch. vii.

“The etcher needs, no doubt, some manual skill, some patience, and a moderate amount of care, but these avail him



nothing if they are accompanied by the engraver's coldness. The one capacity which makes all his other powers available is the capacity for passionate emotion."—*Etching and Etchers*, book i. ch. xii.

"What makes a good etching so peculiarly precious is that it gives us meaning severed as widely as possible from mere handicraft. It is a lump of gold dug out of the artist's brain, and not yet alloyed for general circulation. But when artists thus trenchantly sever mechanism from mind, and offer mind by itself, they discover, of course, that it is not a very saleable commodity."—Signed article in the *Fine Arts Quarterly Review* for January 1864.

"So far from being the most mechanical kind of engraving, etching, as we understand it, is the least mechanical, because the true etchers never think about mechanical perfections at all, using lines simply for the expression of artistic thought."—*The Etcher's Handbook*, ch. xviii.

"We affirm that an etched line, as a good etcher draws it, is less mechanical than a burin line, since its modulations, produced by the operation of the intellect, or feeling of the artist, are more numerous and delicate, because the tool is more obedient. The anxiety to attain mechanical perfection would probably injure an etcher by diminishing the spontaneousness of his expression."—*The Etcher's Handbook*, ch. xviii.

"The true finish lies in the intensity and successfulness of the mental act, and that may be proved quite as much by selection and omission as by hand-labour. Always endeavour, in etching, to express your thought in as few





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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

## COVER AND TITLE-PAGE.

### 1. *Designs on the back of this volume, above and below the title.*

These designs of Plovers and Teal are from an etching by M. Bracquemond, called *Vanneaux et Sarcelles* (see page 225). They are as faithful an interpretation of Bracquemond's manner as the material would permit. They are intended to show the appearance of an etched plate before it is bitten, the black representing the smoked black ground in which the etching is drawn, and the gold the lines of bare copper, which are afterwards to come black in the printing. All that is left black on the plate is white in the printed proof.

The finer lines in this drawing are purposely run together into simple broad lines, because they would not have printed distinctly in the gold.

### 2. *Design in gold on black on the side of the volume.*

This represents, as accurately as the materials would permit, the appearance of part of Turner's plate called the *Little Devil's Bridge* (see page 272), when he had just drawn the lines on the plate. The black represents the black smoked etching ground, and the gold the copper as it was laid bare by the etching point. The block with which this is stamped on the cover was reproduced photographically from an off-track (see page 444) from my copy of Turner's lines, which is given at page 272. It is more nearly accurate than any other manner of reproduction would have permitted, but the lines are for the most part broader than Turner's lines on the copper must have been, and they are all much less pure and clear, as the reader will easily see by comparing them with those in my etching after Turner. However, they have always the true direction, and the design may be of use in preparing the eye of a beginner for the appearance of a drawing on metal in negative, which is all that it is intended for.

### 3. *Woodcut on the Title-page.*

This is a copy on wood, by Mr. Cooper, of one of Rembrandt's best portraits of himself. It is, I think, the most perfect imitation of etching by wood engraving that I ever saw. Mr. Cooper wisely selected a plate which could be reproduced by accurately placed dots and lines, and which did not exhibit those qualities of texture that cannot be imitated by wood-engraving.

The portrait here copied is that numbered 216 in M. Charles Blanc's Catalogue. It is called "Rembrandt au bonnet plat."

## ETCHINGS.

All the etchings in this volume, with the exception of plates IX. and XII., are copied by the author.

Plate IX. is an original sketch from nature by Lalanne, and Plate XII. is an original sketch from nature by the author.

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# ETCHING AND ETCHERS.

## BOOK I.

### *POWERS AND QUALITIES OF THE ART.*



# CHAPTER I.

## *ETCHING COMPARED WITH OTHER ARTS.*

### L WITH PAINTING IN OIL.

**S**ETTING aside the obvious difference in favour of painting, that it can represent colour, we find another difference, scarcely less obvious, in the manner of interpretation. The brush is a better instrument than the point, because less conventional, since it does not necessarily resort to lines, and lines do not exist in nature. So far, painting is the higher art ; but it is not quite so well adapted to the expression of transient thought. Oil-sketching may be exceedingly rapid, but the medium does not under all circumstances admit of memoranda so completely explanatory as those which may be obtained with the point. In the most valuable oil-sketching, that in which the true relations of masses of colour are accurately preserved, form has to be sacrificed ; and yet form is usually more important than colour in the expression of artistic ideas. The very presence of colour entails, in hasty work, the abandonment of form, because in coloured art bad colour is intolerable, and good colour is not attainable at high speed, unless it is made the chief aim of the artist. When an etching and an oil picture are both produced in the same space of time, the etching is likely to contain a more delicate definition of many interesting points of form than the picture can. An



elaborate picture, the labour of weeks or months, may contain more form than any *good* etching, because good etchings are almost<sup>1</sup> always done quickly; but the finished painting loses in freshness what it gains in completion, and belongs to a wholly different class of art. The aim of a laboured picture is power by accumulation; the aim of an etching is power by abstraction and concentration. It is certain that some very valuable qualities in oil painting can only be attained by frequent correction and repainting; the work is done over and over again, often scraped till the previous work shows through, and then the broken tints so obtained, and which cannot be obtained in any other manner, are made available for the expression of natural variety and infinity. It will be shown in the course of this volume that some results of this kind are more or less attainable in laboured etching, but they are not entirely in harmony with the idea of etching as an independent art. If we remain within the limits of true etching, and then compare it simply with such oil painting as alone is competent to convey rapid inspirations, we shall find that the worker in oil is obliged to sacrifice much to colour which the etcher easily preserves; and farther, that the very heaviness of the medium, when the painter sketches in thick colour, is an obstacle to liberty of expression which the freely-gliding point avoids. The modern habit of sketching in varnish is in some respects more free, but the adhesiveness of the varnish often interferes with perfect liberty, and has to be continually corrected by additions of turpentine. In this method, as in simple oil painting, the embarrassment of colour of course remains.

<sup>1</sup> The reader will please notice the reserve implied by this word *almost*. Some good etchers have worked slowly, and gradually completed their etchings by successive processes. Justice will be done to these artists in their place.





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rival it in vivacity of accent.<sup>1</sup> When a sepia drawing, complete as a study of light and dark, aims also at delicate indications of form, it becomes too costly in point of time to note impressions whilst they are perfectly vivid. The difference between sepia and etching, if the same time is allowed to both, is entirely in favour of sepia if accurate noting of light and shade is the object, and as entirely in favour of etching if the artist wishes to draw attention to points of character. It is exceedingly difficult in etching, and without great labour and correction almost impossible, to note all delicate weights of tone according to the wish and intention of the artist; but in sepia or Indian ink this is so easy that where there is failure it may at once be attributed to the artist's weakness in chiaroscuro. The first aim of a sepia drawing ought to be perfect light and shade, because that is the especial perfection attainable in the method; but for an etcher to make complete light and shade his first aim would be barbarous, because it could only be attainable in his art by great labour, and at the cost of qualities more purely mental which ought to be the glory of his work.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless the etcher has worked very laboriously for tone, and is a master of the craft, in which case he may possibly get the relations of light and dark as in a sepia drawing, but never easily.

<sup>2</sup> There is a new school of etching which may be said to have come into being since the first edition of this work was published, and which aims at nothing less than the complete translation of oil-pictures into light and shade. The best men have succeeded in this quite sufficiently to justify their attempt; but the desire for perfect light and shade is dangerous to the more important quality of expressive drawing, and even to light and shade itself, for unless the true relations are attained, the attempt to reach them ends in mere blackness or a general dulness of foul greys, which is even worse. An etcher from pictures, who is in reality an engraver using etching as a means of translation, will naturally give great effort to attain true relations of tone; but an original etcher ought not to make them his first object; expression by line ought to be *his* first object.



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#### 4. WITH DRAWING IN CHALK AND LITHOGRAPHY.

Since chalk-drawings on paper and on stone have the same qualities, they may be considered as one art. Lithography is richer than etching in the fulness of a touch, *c'est plus gras*, its touch is softer and blends better. Some pictures can be better interpreted by lithography than by etching. For example, Troyon is admirably rendered by good lithographers, such as Loutrel, Français, and Eugène Le Roux, and their lithographs convey a better idea of his manner than etching would. All that is said of etching as an autographic art is equally true of lithography ; a lithograph by Harding is just as truly his own as a drawing done by him directly on paper. I have often felt surprised that fine lithographs should not be more valued than they are ; it is true that the world has been flooded with bad ones, but the existence of bad performances in any art ought not to produce the impression that the art is generally weak. No one looks for great art in a lithograph ; yet lithography is perfectly competent to express great ideas. But, though quite as autographic as etching, and though an appearance of richness is more easily attainable in it, lithography is so far inferior to etching in precision and sharpness of minute accent, that it is inconceivable how one of Rembrandt's keen little visages could ever be fairly rendered by chalk on stone. The points on which expression depends in the etching of a face are so infinitely minute, that no blunt instrument can render them, and the lithographer's chalk is always, when compared with the etching needle, a blunt instrument. It is also continually crumbling away under his hand, and the very grain of the stone he works upon, though necessary to detach and hold the particles of chalk on which his effect depends, is an impediment to the clearness of lines. The lithographer has one great advantage over the etcher, he can



see what he is doing, and though drawings on stone always look better on the stone itself than they do in the printed proofs, the artist does not work in negative as etchers do, but in black upon the pleasant warm tint of the stone, just as if he were drawing in black chalk upon tinted paper.

## 5. WITH PEN-DRAWING AND INK LITHOGRAPHY.

In polite circles, where a knowledge of the fine arts has not yet penetrated, it is customary to call pen-drawings "etchings;" and since the existence of the real art of etching is but little known, it will generally be found that when a young lady is said to etch well it does not mean that she bites copper-plates with acid, but simply that she draws nicely with pen and ink. There are also persons more advanced in the study of the fine arts, who, although aware that etching and pen-drawing are distinct arts, believe nevertheless that their powers and capacities are identical. The truth is, however, that there are several important points of difference, all which, except one, are in favour of etching. The pen is a very free instrument when compared with the burin, but it is not so free as the etching-needle, and the liberty of the artist is still further limited by the necessity for avoiding blots, which easily occur in close shading. Drawing with the pen may be divided into two distinct arts. In its first, or simple form, pen-drawing consists of lines variously disposed, but *always drawn with ink of the same strength*; in its more complex form, pen-drawing reaches greater delicacy by using ink of infinitely various degrees of dilution, from the palest that can be visible in a line to the blackest that will flow from the pen. The first method can only compete with the most primitive etching, because it can only imitate etchings done in one biting; but the second can also, though at some distance, imitate the more complex etchings produced by several bitings.



It remains to be observed that there is a marked distinction between etching and pen-drawing, as practical arts, in the effect of pressure with the point of the instrument. If you press with your pen you enlarge your line, so that pressure becomes an important means of expression. In etching, on the other hand, pressure ought always to be absolutely equal, and the enlargement of the line can only be effected by taking a blunter point. Pressure, in etching, ought to be equal, because where it is too heavy the point ploughs the copper and causes over-biting, and where it is too light the varnish is not perfectly removed, though it may seem to be, and the acid either produces no line at all or a broken series of dashes and dots. We are so accustomed, in the fine arts, to consider pressure as a means of varying expression, that inexperienced etchers find the greatest difficulty in reaching the steady equality of it which is necessary to the success of the subsequent biting ; and this difficulty is likely to be felt the most by etchers accustomed to express themselves in arts, such, for example, as violin-playing, where every *crescendo* is an increase of pressure, and every *diminuendo* a diminution of it.

Pen-lithography belongs to the first of the two classes of pen-drawing ; paleness cannot be obtained in it by dilution of ink, but only by the thinness and paucity of the lines. It follows that pen-lithography can never approach etching in variety of depth, and can neither rival, on the one hand, the delicacy of its fainter passages, nor, on the other, the vigorous depths of its strongly-bitten blacks. If we add to these inferiorities the comparative want of freedom caused by the use of an instrument which may produce a blot if too full,<sup>1</sup> or a vacant scratch when it runs dry, and which requires replenishing every minute (a continual interruption to the rapid utterance of thought), we have grounds for a com-

<sup>1</sup> When the blot is intentional in pen-drawing, it is a great source of power, and is constantly used by skilful artists.



parison which is entirely favourable to etching. Pen-lithography has, however, the great advantages of showing the result during the progress of the work, and avoiding the dangers, whilst it misses the charms, of many bitings. It is consequently far better suited for amateurs.

## 6. WITH DRAWING IN BLACK LEAD.

The black lead pencil has some definite advantages over the etching-needle. It may be cut very broad, and in this state will rapidly produce pale tints of fine quality, not to be rivalled in etching without much greater labour. It will also yield various degrees of blackness to a variety of pressure. As lead-pencils are made of different kinds, some very hard and others soft and black, some with broad leads for shading, and others to be cut to a fine point, very various qualities are attainable in pencil-drawing. There may be an infinite delicacy and precision with the point, an even breadth of shade, and some considerable depth in the extreme darks. It is, however, especially in these darks that pencil-drawing comparatively fails, because it has an unpleasant tendency to shine, and the blackest black produced with a lead-pencil is always light in comparison with printer's ink. The degree of freedom enjoyed by the designer in black-lead is greater than the pen allows, but inferior to the freedom of the etching-point. It may be observed, however, that for artists who have not reached a very high degree of decision, this freedom of the etching-point is too excessive to be altogether an advantage. The lead-pencil depresses the surface of the paper where it passes, and so makes for itself a shallow channel whose sides are deep enough to prevent involuntary slips ; but the surface of polished copper is so very smooth, and the thin coat of varnish resists so little, that the etcher has need of great firmness and precision in the hand itself, for he can never safely rest upon the point. It follows that



pencil-drawing is a far easier art than etching, and in common with the other arts we have been considering, it has the great advantage of being a positive art, etching (by the process usually followed) being altogether negative. It is scarcely necessary to explain these useful terms, borrowed from photography; but as a few readers may be unacquainted with them, it may be well to add that a positive art is one in which darks are represented by darks, and lights by lights; whereas in a negative art, such as etching, darks are represented (in the direct work of the artist) by lights, and lights by darks. This adds greatly to the difficulty of etching, especially in the case of beginners, who find themselves greatly embarrassed by the impossibility (to them) of translating their work into its corresponding positive, as the printing-press will translate it. In sculpture, the sculptor who makes a bas-relief works in positive, and the seal-engraver and die-sinker in negative; but the seal-engraver has a great advantage over the etcher in being able to take frequent proofs of his work during its progress, which the etcher can only do after removing the varnish from his plate.

The finest pencil-drawings do not attempt depths of shade, but content themselves with comparatively pale tones. The worst pencil-drawings, those of school-boys who pursue the fine arts, usually abound in passages where great pressure and much repetition, and *very* black pencils indeed, have ended in the production of such brilliant black-leading as might delight the eyes of an artistic housemaid. The blacks of etching are safer in quality, for, at least, they never shine, and easily reach an intense depth; but the pale tones of pencil-drawing are safer than the pale tones of etching. As to the value of the two methods, much depends on the kind of subject, and much upon the temper of the master. A naked figure, by Gérôme, is better in pencil, because its modelling is truer and more delicate than any modelling Gérôme could express with the etching-needle; but an old



man's face, by Rembrandt, is rendered more incisively with the point than it could be with any other instrument.

### 7. WITH THE GRAPHOTYPE.

Since the Graphotype is a recent invention, it may be necessary, first, to give a brief description of the process. Finely powdered chalk is spread thickly on a metal plate and then subjected to hydraulic pressure till it becomes a solid mass with a beautiful white surface, slightly shining, but not inconveniently brilliant. On this surface the artist draws in a glutinous ink, perfectly black, flowing from a finely-pointed little brush; the pen cannot be used, on account of the friability of the chalk. The ink glues the particles of chalk where it passes, and when the drawing is complete the white spaces between the lines are easily hollowed by rubbing them gently with a piece of velvet or a light brush. The black lines remain in relief, like the lines of a woodcut. The plate is then dipped in a solution of flint and so hardened, after which a stereotype cast, or an electrotype copy, is taken from it, and this stereotype or electrotype serves to print from as a woodcut.

The most obvious advantage of the graphotype is that it is a positive process in every sense. Not only is it superior to etching in showing the artist black for black and white for white, instead of glittering copper for black, and lamp-black for white, but it is superior both to etching and lithography in the entire absence of reversing; the objects that will be to the right in the print are to the artist's right as he works. It is as easy as drawing upon paper with a brush-point and ink of uniform thickness, in lines. No brushwork in the painter's sense is possible, nor are any more or less pale lines, but the lines may vary in thickness.

The graphotype is as autographic as any process ever





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of it. But as it happens that paper is white and light-coloured, for the most part, and as people are accustomed to see drawings done in dark upon white, because it is easier to make a very black line on white paper than a very white line upon black, it follows that black upon white has come to be considered by the world in general a more natural and rational, and in every way more orthodox, method of proceeding than white upon black. So the wood engravers have all along been laboriously cutting out bits of white to make us feel as if they had engraved the black lines, and every hasty scrawl of the draughtsman has had to be carefully cut round by them. Hence, wood engraving has not been a genuine art, except in a few instances, nor have its natural powers been duly cultivated. It has occupied the position of some man of great natural ability, who has had the misfortune to be bred to a profession for which his faculties were always unsuited, who by dint of long study and patience has taught himself to do what was required of him, but who has left his true self uncultivated and unexpressed. There are several instances of true wood engraving in the illustrations of Gustave Doré; but there are many more examples of attempts to imitate other arts. The most genuine wood engraving may be known at once by the perfect frankness of its white lines, and the plain intention of its white spaces, as cut out *lights*, not mere intervals of white paper. It may be objected that art more naturally proceeds by black lines than by white lines; but this is one of the common illusions of custom. We are more accustomed to see artists work in black lines than in white; but if the question be referred to nature, it will be found that natural darks are relieved against lights, and lights against darks, in about equal proportion, so that the power of drawing white lines is just about as useful as the power of drawing black ones. The next time the reader sees a common hedge he will have an opportunity for testing this



doctrine, and will as often find light twigs against dark places as the converse.<sup>1</sup>

An attempt to compare wood engraving with etching is embarrassed by the various false directions of wood engraving as practised by contemporary artists. One of its recent developments is the imitation of etching itself; and here, of course, the false art remains at an infinite distance from the true one. No wood engraving can ever reach the variety of tint obtained by variety of biting; and although modern woodcutters are, as mechanics, skilful to a degree which would have astonished Albert Durer, no surface printing can give lines of such fineness and delicacy as may be reached by etched lines, or dry-point scratches, with the ink *in* them. The best way to compare the wood engraver's imitation of etching with etching itself is to put such woodcut copies of Rembrandt's etchings as those published in the "*Histoire des Peintres*" side by side with the originals. The woodcuts in that publication are as good as any modern imitative work whatever, so that the comparison is a fair one. The character of the original is cleverly suggested; but the degree of reproduction attained is about that attainable in a pen-drawing, with thick Indian ink, never diluted for lighter passages.

<sup>1</sup> As instances of genuine wood engraving, by white lines and spaces, may be mentioned the following subjects from Doré's "*Quixote*:"—" *Mais, Seigneur, est-ce bonne règle de chevalerie que nous allions ainsi par ces montagnes comme des enfants perdus?*"—Vol. i. ch. xxv. engraved by Pisan. "Tandis qu'on naviguait ainsi, Zoraïde restait à mes côtés."—Vol. i. ch. xli. engraved by Pisan. "Enfin au bout de trois jours on trouva la capricieuse Léandra dans le fond d'une caverne."—Vol. i. ch. li. engraved by Pisan. "J'ai déjà fait, Seigneur Durandart, ce que vous m'avez commandé dans la fatale journée de notre déroute."—Vol. ii. ch. xxiii. engraved by Pisan. "Je suis Merlin, celui que les histoires disent avoir eu le diable pour père."—Vol. ii. ch. xxxv. without engraver's name. "Là se termine le chant de l'amoureuse Altisidore."—Vol. ii. ch. xlv. engraved by Pisan. In the last the reader may observe the frank cross-hatching of white lines on the stones above the door. Some black lines are still preserved, however, from habit, especially in the dresses of the ladies.



Another kind of wood engraving is the imitation of burin-work on copper or steel. By far the best instances of this are the cuts after Durer's copper or steel plates in the work just referred to, especially the "Melancholy," which is a wonderful example of clear and minute line-cutting. To compare work of this kind with etching is unnecessary, because all the qualities of woodcut imitations of steel engraving are possessed in higher perfection by steel engraving itself, which we shall shortly have to consider.

Next to woodcutting in avowed white lines, the kind of work in which the engraver has most to do is the interpretation of tints. In facsimile engraving, the engraver has nothing to do beyond the removal of unstained wood, an operation requiring no more intellect, though greater manual skill, than the rubbing away of chalk in the graphotype. But the accurate interpretation of tints requires great artistic judgment, as well as great manual skill; and the wood engraver who renders a washed drawing without missing any essential relation of tone, and by means of lines invented by himself, is exercising an art which, whether true or false in its method, has claims of its own, and may be seriously compared with etching. What first strikes us is a wide difference in popularity, entirely in favour of wood engraving. Interpretative wood engraving (as opposed to facsimile wood engraving) is in the fullest and most extensive sense popular. Many thousands of copies of woodcut illustrations are sold easily, when the same subjects, if they had been etched on copper, would have found with difficulty two or three hundred purchasers. This is due, in part, to the greater cheapness of woodcuts, which may be cheaply printed, and will yield immense editions without deterioration; but it is also due, and in a still greater degree, to some quality in wood engraving which charms the ordinary spectator, and which is either absent from etching or neutralised by some other peculiarity offensive to the uneducated eye.



It is probable that this quality is an appearance of softness. First-rate modern woodcutting, aided by the artifice of inserting various thicknesses of paper, so as to obtain a variety of pressure in the printing, attains a degree of softness in itself highly agreeable, and always delightful to the ignorant. Etching, on the contrary, has a natural tendency to look meagre and "scratchy," a tendency overcome only by the most skilful masters.<sup>1</sup> If the reader will take the trouble to compare Mr. Birket Foster's drawings on wood, as interpreted by Mr. Edmund Evans, with the etchings of the same artist, he will at once understand the popular feeling, though he may not fully share it. The engravings are richer and softer than the etchings; they have more amenity. It is with the fine arts as with individual men: amenity is a more popular quality than freedom or truth. Etching is like those characters in real life, too seldom appreciated at their full value, who have abundant energy, great freedom of manner, and an insight too keen to be always agreeable, and whose intense personality and originality make them almost incapable of concession or conformity. Wood engraving is usually executed in quite a different spirit. The engraver does not work passionately, like the true etcher, but gives patient and skilled labour to make his work pleasant to the eye. His art is thus more in unison with the temper of society, which likes a gentle manner and perfect training in little things, and rather objects to intellect, if it disdains conventional expression, and takes no pains to make itself agreeable. The whole life of the wood engraver is devoted to arts of interpretation, which the etcher disdains as mechanism; and it is to the perfection attained in these minor arts that the popularity of modern wood engraving is due.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> But entirely overcome by them. There are etchings by Rajon and Hédouin, for example, in which the quality of softness, wherever the artist desired it, has been as fully attained as it could be even in a chalk or charcoal drawing.

<sup>2</sup> In the best wood engraving there is often a lively sparkle due to the intelligent



## 9. WITH ENGRAVING IN MEZZOTINT.

Having prepared his plate by roughening it all over with a heavy tool, so constructed as to present a great number of little sharp teeth, each of which produces a small indentation and raises a corresponding bur, the engraver in mezzotint starts from a point exactly opposed to that of the aquafortist. His plate, before anything is represented upon it, yields an impression which is entirely black, and a very rich soft black, perfectly equal, and showing no line or mark of any kind. The etcher's plate, on the contrary, yields a perfectly white impression. The engraver in mezzotint, like the engraver on wood, makes his plate lighter as he works, whilst the etcher darkens his plate. There is also another difference, not less important—the etcher works by lines, and the mezzotint engraver by spaces. The consequence of these differences of method is a difference of quality and spirit. Every art, so long as it is healthy and rightly pursued, tends to express chiefly those artistic ideas which it can express most easily. Mezzotint is naturally rich and soft, with the corresponding defect of vagueness and want of precision in detail, and because its blacks are so full and perfect, and so cheaply obtained, it has a tendency to blackness. Etching tends to thinness and hardness, but is capable of any conceivable degree of firmness and precision in detail. It would be absolutely impossible to engrave in pure mezzotint one of Rembrandt's etched faces on the same scale, without missing some of those sharp and delicate accents upon which the power of the work mainly depends. On the other hand, although pure etching, without the bur raised by the dry

way in which the engraver has utilised touches of white, often very minute. You seldom find this quality in etching, but it is perfectly attainable by the etcher who chooses to make it one of his technical purposes. See the chapter in this volume on the works of Samuel Palmer.



point,<sup>1</sup> can never imitate the peculiar velvety softness of mezzotint, it can fully rival its depth and richness of effect. The two arts are to a considerable extent complementary of each other. Pure etching, when not laborious in finish, has a meagre look which mezzotint corrects, and mezzotint has a want of energy and precision which a few etched lines may often effectually supply. Mezzotint and etching are therefore often seen in combination, as in the "Liber Studiorum" of Turner. Engravers' etching, in combination with mezzotint, is now popular enough, when helped by machine ruling, for the production of large prints to hang in drawing-rooms. The mezzotint gives a look of softness, and the machine-ruling an appearance of neatness, which make the etching pass current with the print-buying section of the public.

#### 10. WITH LINE-ENGRAVING.

The mechanical difficulties of line-engraving are so great that they have naturally absorbed much of the attention of line-engravers—*so much* that the conquest of mechanical difficulty has been too often regarded by them as the chief aim of their lives, to the neglect of artistic qualities. The degradation of line-engraving was complete when a tradition had at length regulated every method of interpretation, and, leaving nothing to the instinct and feeling of the workman, prescribed for him where to put thick lines and thin lines, and lozenges with dots in the middle. Having attained skill in a difficult handicraft, the engravers became proud of their accomplishments, and, forgetting that the only rational use of them could be the interpretation of artistic ideas, took to displaying them for themselves, without reference to either nature or art. To cut lines regularly and put dots neatly became an aim in itself. The instrument chiefly used by line-engravers, the burin, is answerable for much of

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on Dry Point.



this lamentable aberration. No tool used in the fine arts has less freedom. It is difficult to handle, requires the application of an appreciable amount of force, and is always slow, even in the most skilful hands. The lines which it cuts are singularly pure and sharp, and it can vary both their thickness and their depth, obediently to the pressure of the fingers and the lower part of the palm. It describes beautiful curves quite naturally, like a skate that bites in ice, but it has great difficulty in following violent and minute irregularities. Its operation on the mind of the artist who uses it is always to make him patient and very attentive to mechanical matters, for which he has to be perfectly cool, and this coolness easily chills into coldness. If modern line-engravers were in the habit of engraving their own inventions, as Durer did, the chilling influence of the instrument would have been less visible in their work, because a man who expresses his own thought has always more heat and vivacity than a man who only interprets the thought of another. The misfortune of line-engraving has been that mechanical dexterity has been made too absorbing a pursuit, and that it has been devoted too exclusively to copyism. No art could long resist these adverse influences. Even etching itself, free and original as it is, would lose much of its freedom and all its originality, if the public required from it mechanical perfection, and set it to the dull business of copying finished pictures.

The decline of line-engraving, in the commercial sense, has been due to its great costliness rather than to any artistic deficiency, and as this costliness in money is merely an expression for costliness in time, line-engraving cannot flourish as etching may, in spite of public neglect, because the practitioners of it cannot afford to pursue it without reference to pecuniary results. Such an art as line-engraving cannot exist without liberal support, but the failure of such support is not to be taken as any proof of inferiority





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cloud-forms, their melting imperceptible gradations. But the engravers have truly made plates of copper yield images as closely resembling skies as the absence of colour and feebleness of art's light may admit of; they have done more than suggest, they have represented.

A brief recapitulation of the foregoing pages may be useful before we proceed farther.

Etching is superior to oil-sketching in form, and to oil-painting in freshness. It is inferior to both in truth of tone, unless at the cost of immense labour, aided by uncommon skill.

It is superior to water-colour in decision and directness, because its earliest work remains, being never obliterated by subsequent washes and removals.

It is inferior to sepia-drawing in accurate rendering of weights of light and dark, but superior to it in indications of form.

It is superior to lithography in precision of minute form and sharpness of accent, but inferior to it in richness and fulness of touch.

It is superior to pen-drawing in freedom, variety, and power, but inferior to it in not being sensitive to pressure.

It is superior to the lead-pencil in depth and power, but inferior to it in equality of pale gradations.

It is superior to the graphotype in variety of depth and in delicacy of line, but inferior so far as executive facility is concerned in being entirely a negative art, whilst the graphotype is entirely positive. Etching is, however, superior to the graphotype in freedom.

Etching is superior to wood engraving in freedom and depth, but inferior to it in the kind of amenity which is popular.

It is inferior to mezzotint in softness, but excels it in firmness and precision.

It is far superior to line-engraving in freedom, but, unless



in exceptional instances inferior to it in the modelling of flesh. Etching is also very far inferior to the best modern point-engraving in the representation of skies.

The strong points of etching in comparison with other arts are its great freedom, precision, and power. Its weak points may be reduced to a single head. The accurate subdivision of delicate tones, or, in two words, perfect tonality, is very difficult in etching ; so that perfect modelling is very rare in the art, and the true representation of skies, which depends on the most delicate discrimination of these values, still rarer.



## CHAPTER II.

### *DIFFICULTIES AND FACILITIES OF ETCHING.*

**I**N an article on Mr. Haden's etchings in the "Fine Arts Quarterly Review," Mr. Palgrave gives some encouragement to the general opinion that etching is one of the easiest of the arts. "Mr. Haden has wisely chosen that branch of art which lays by far the smallest stress on a long course of manual practice. Engraving in its severest forms must probably be placed below oil-painting or sculpture in its manual demands. But the highest skill in etching might be reached sooner than the skill to lay one square inch of even lines with the graver."

Mr. Palgrave refers to the difficulty of manual execution only, and there is much truth in what he says, but not the whole truth. In speaking of an art like etching, it is exceedingly difficult to detach manual from intellectual qualities. In line-engraving this is easier, because in line-engraving manual dexterities have been made a distinct aim, and you know when a man can make lozenges of equal dimensions, and put his dots exactly in the middle of them. But the peculiarity of etching, and its great nobility as a fine art, consist in its disdain of all mechanical or purely manual dexterities whatever. The quality of an etched line depends on its meaning, and on that alone. Skill in etching is always complicated with considerations of feeling and knowledge; if you eliminate these anybody may etch, because anybody can make lines on a varnished plate as clear and free as Haden's.



When Mr. Palgrave says that "the highest skill in etching might be reached sooner than the skill to lay one square inch of even lines with the graver," he does not tell us by what sort of person this "highest skill" in etching might be so easily reached. This is unfortunate, because the reader may allowably infer that average humanity is understood.

The "highest skill in etching" cannot be reached at all by the average aspirant. Thousands have attempted etching, and these include painters of considerable artistic culture and experience. In this multitude you cannot find thirty first-rate etchers: there are not twenty, there may be ten. If there is any human pursuit wholly inaccessible to men of ordinary powers, it is etching. In this respect there is nothing comparable to it except poetry. Patient industry and some imitative faculty may produce a passable engraving; learning and long training an academic picture; but nobody can be taught to make fine etchings or fine poems.

Some pursuits require long labour, but reward all students of fair ability who are willing to give the labour; amongst these are the common trades and professions. Other pursuits reward a few aspirants richly and speedily, but to men of ordinary organisation give no return for a whole life of toil. The first may be difficult, but are yet possible to all sane men at the price of ten or fifteen years' labour; the second may be what is called "easy," and yet to nineteen men out of twenty absolutely and eternally unattainable.

The highest skill in poetry might be reached sooner than a comprehensive acquaintance with historical literature.

Yes, if you presuppose a Tennyson.

The greatest technical difficulty of etching—not precisely a "manual" difficulty, for it depends in great measure upon the use of the mordant—is the difficulty of arriving at the relative weights of dark which the artist desires.

In this respect etching is far more difficult than any form



of art where results are immediately visible. An artist may be able to get the tones he wants in sepia, or with the pen, and yet be altogether uncertain with the etching-needle.

Etching is here more difficult than line-engraving, because the engraver sees his plate, and has frequent proofs taken during its progress, for his guidance.

A negative process is always so far more difficult than a positive process. Drawing on wood, lithography, and the graphotype, are technically easier than negative etching.

When the brush can be used for shading, instead of lines, there is, so far, greater facility. Setting aside the difficulty of colour, painting is easier than etching.

In an introductory letter by M. Charles Blanc, prefixed to Lalanne's treatise on etching, occurs the following passage :—

“ Ah ! si les dilettantes qui s'ennuient, si les artistes qui aiment à fixer une impression fugitive, si les riches qui sont blasés sur les plaisirs de la photographie savaient combien est piquant l'intérêt de l'eau-forte, votre petit ouvrage aurait un succès fou. Il n'est pas jusqu'aux femmes élégantes et lettrées qui, fatiguées de leur désœuvrement et de leurs chiffons ne puissent trouver un délassement plein d'attraits dans l'art de dessiner sur le vernis et d'y faire mordre avec esprit leurs fantaisies d'un jour.”

It is very possible that if ladies in general were to take up etching as they took up potichomanie a few years ago, the sale of manuals on etching might become very considerable, but the cause of true art would gain nothing by the spread of a delusive fashion of that kind. In the whole range of the arts it is not possible to suggest one so unsuitable for ordinary amateurs. Very much of the merit of an etching depends upon abstraction, and abstraction requires even greater knowledge than elaboration. Etching must be done



rapidly and decisively, whereas when the untrained draughtsman goes fast he always goes wrong, and when he is rigidly decisive it is rigidity in error. A process to suit amateurs should require as little abstraction as possible, and allow of as much hesitation and correction; above all, the effects of work done should be clearly and immediately visible. The most suitable art for amateurs is oil painting without the embarrassment of colour. A tube of flake white and a tube of Vandyke brown, a prepared milled-board, a selection of hog brushes, and a little linseed oil, are the easiest materials for an amateur to manage; with these he can see what he is doing, and may correct and efface as much as ever he pleases.<sup>1</sup> But a copper plate covered with black varnish, in which every line shows itself in glittering metal, an arrangement of shading made wholly with a view to a future biting, a needle that slips about on the smooth copper every time the hand trembles or hesitates—these are *not* favourable conditions.

Having quoted two writers with whom, however greatly we may respect their general ability, we find it impossible to concur on this particular question of the supposed facility of etching, it is agreeable to change the attitude of opposition for that of cordial approval, and conclude the chapter with a quotation which has our entire adherence.

In the "Fine Arts Quarterly" for June 1866, a writer who preferred to remain anonymous, but who gave evidence of unusual knowledge of his subject, as well as unusual enthusiasm for it, naturally found himself obliged to notice a delusion which, however unworthy of serious attention, too generally detracts from the estimation of etching to be passed over in silence :—

<sup>1</sup> The new independent art of charcoal drawing as practised by the clever Frenchmen who invented it, or rather established it upon a basis of its own, is also exceedingly well adapted for amateur study; and, if properly pursued, at the same time very instructive and rapidly rewarding.



“Of all modern misapprehensions connected with etching—once accounted an art in which only a master could excel—is that which supposes it to be particularly suited to the half-educated artist. The experience which has arisen out of close observation and practice, and which enabled the old etcher to express himself promptly and by simple means, is in these days, it would seem, a proof that his treatment is loose, and that he deals only in indications. The fact that he has learned to select essentials and reject non-essentials, and especially if he is able to do this before nature, that he is merely sketching; in short, the very qualities which even a great artist is the last to arrive at—simplicity and breadth—are, for some unaccountable reason, quoted to his prejudice if he happens to be able to observe them on copper. For ourselves, we are well persuaded that etching, of all the arts, is the one least fitted to the amateur; supposing, of course, the amateur to be the person he is generally described to be. But there are amateurs of different degree.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The central difficulty, of a technical kind, in etching, and at the same time a difficulty peculiar to this art, is the biting. By great delicacy of observation and keenness of judgment in guessing how something is going on which you can never quite clearly see, you may finally overcome this difficulty enough for practical purposes; that is to say, you may bite accurately enough for the plate to be brought right ultimately by re-biting and partial rubbing-out with charcoal, but there will ever remain a degree of uncertainty about biting, which is a very great difficulty indeed. The reader will find much more on this subject towards the end of the volume.





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occasionally printed painters' etchings, but was more commonly employed upon engravings, divided the etchings of engravers and those of painters into two categories, as being "finished" and "unfinished." The plates of Rembrandt were not, in his view, completed works, but attempts at engraving, which had stopped far short of completion, because the artist was unable to carry them farther.

There exists also an idea that etching is an "imperfect art." It is not more imperfect than line-engraving, though its limitations are different. Every art has its limitations. No sculptor could ever carve a tree in marble, and yet we do not speak of sculpture as an "imperfect art." The powers and limitations of etching are fairly examined elsewhere in this volume, and the writer's conclusion is by no means unfavourable. Indeed, it is easy to show that the art is unusually versatile.

A notion which could grow up nowhere but in England, the natural home of theories about the dignity of occupations, is, that etching is beneath the attention of great painters. The writer actually met with a printseller who considered it beneath Landseer's dignity, as a knight and Academician, to condescend to etch! No serious refutation can be given to objections of this kind.

These signs of apathy are briefly noticed here to mark the stage we are just leaving. The reception of Mr. Haden's etchings, and especially the intelligent and abundant criticism which hailed them in the periodical press, was the dawn of a greater enlightenment. Indifference to etching is wholly incompatible with high art-culture; and if we really advance, as we suppose ourselves to do, the true rank and importance of the greatest of the linear arts cannot long remain hidden from us.

Much of the enjoyment which we derive from art consists in recognition of the truths which the artist intended to express. But people recognise only what they already



know ; therefore this pleasure is very slight at first, and increases with our acquired knowledge. And there are certain forms of art so strangely abstracted and abbreviated, that very great knowledge is required in the spectator to read them at all, just as it is necessary to understand a language thoroughly if we would read letters in it in a hurried handwriting, full of marks and abbreviations peculiar to the individual writer. To the informed judge, this kind of artistic expression is, from its perfect frankness, peculiarly interesting ; to the ordinary spectator it is uninteresting, because illegible.

The art of etching has no mechanical attractiveness. If an etching has no meaning it can interest nobody ; if its significant lines are accompanied by many insignificant ones, their value is neutralised. But if all the lines are significant and the spectator unable to read their meaning, they must seem to him quite as worthless as those of a bad etching seem to a thorough critic.

Much of the popularity of engravings is due to the neatness of the mechanical performance, which all recognise. Machine-ruling is agreeable because it is so neat and regular ; mezzotint is pleasant because it is rich and soft ; some oil-painting looks marvellously smooth. Almost every art, except etching, has some external charm of this kind, which, independently of mental expression, serves to secure the approbation of the vulgar. It is because etching has no attraction of this kind that it is not, nor can be, popular.

Since, however, etching relies on qualities of sterling value, it can never cease to be highly appreciated by a limited public of its own ; and in countries where general art-culture is on the increase, this little public must always be adding to its strength, and better able to make its opinion listened to.

This little public, loving the art on high grounds, is naturally fastidious. The buyers of etchings are more diffi-



cult to please than the buyers of pictures. The extensive sale of bad etchings would do no good to the art, and, if etching were popular, it is likely that many etchers would work down to a low popular standard, as so many painters are in these days compelled to do or starve.

It is a matter less for regret than congratulation that an art should exist safe from the baneful influences of vulgar patronage. This is the good side of unpopularity, and it is enough to reconcile all who truly love what is noble and genuine in etching to the general neglect of it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written etching has become more popular, for it is now very commonly employed in the illustration of works upon art, artistic periodicals such as the "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," the "Portfolio," the "Beitschrift für Bildende Kunst," and especially to illustrate catalogues of picture collections. Much technical skill has been developed by this kind of practice, but it may be doubted whether it is likely to make the public understand great spontaneous work better than it did before. On the contrary, the more we are accustomed to high finish of this pictorial kind, the less are we likely to tolerate what may seem to us a ruder expression. Besides, the expression of original thought in etching, which is the essence of the art, is as little encouraged, with one or two exceptions, as ever it was. Etching is now extensively used as one of the forms of engraving, for the interpretation of pictures not painted by the etcher, but it is almost impossible for an etcher to live by original work, however excellent.



## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE INFLUENCE OF CONNOISSEURSHIP.*

**T**HE greatest evil in the present relation of etching to the public is, that in the little world that really cares for it there should exist a too considerable proportion of persons who are rather connoisseurs than amateurs. The distinction between the two is worth insisting upon, because true amateurs can do nothing but good to any art, whilst connoisseurs, though of use in their way, and even necessary in small numbers, mix their usefulness with much that is positively harmful.

A genuine amateur is a person who values art because it is good as art, and not because it is dear and rare. A genuine amateur looks for artistic merits alone, and is so entirely free from the passion of curiosity-hunting, that he guards himself against the curiosity-madness as a man with a great moral ideal guards himself against dipsomania. The love of curiosity-collecting seems to him a weakness, having some possible utility in the preservation of certain objects in a half-civilised century like this, and so to be tolerated till we finally emerge from the condition of savagery ; but he sees clearly that it is not a love of art. Somebody with the curiosity-mania happens to take up button-collecting, or cork-collecting, or autograph-collecting, or by accident he may be turned to the collecting of etchings, which, on account of rare states, offers as much to interest him as anything else ; but the true amateur knows the difference between this fancy and the love of art for its



own sake. One such amateur said, "I earnestly wish that all works of art, good, bad, and indifferent, were just worth as much as a gallon of atmospheric air, and no more; we should find out *then* who loved art and who didn't." A man who could say that, and, having a collection of his own, wish it heartily, had the spirit of the noblest amateurship. That spirit desires what is good, but takes no pride in the exclusive possession of it, and only wishes that others might have the good things also, and the ability to enjoy them. If I have a rare etching by Rembrandt, and am happy and proud that other people want it, and envy me because they cannot get it, I lie in the slough and mire of a low egotism, and if I glorify myself as a lover of art on these grounds I deserve no good report. A fair test of true amateurship is the way people take the recent discovery of steeling. In former times an etching on copper yielded a few hundred impressions, and a dry-point about one-tenth of the number, before the plate was worn into worthlessness. The finest impressions were the earliest, and when the plate became old it yielded impressions so wretched, that copies of the finest Rembrandts, in the last stage of their existence, are now not worth in the market more than a thousandth part of the value of the earlier proofs, whilst the difference in artistic estimation would be much wider, being infinite. But in these latter days an ingenious Frenchman has called in electricity to remedy this evil. He covers a copper plate, after it is engraved, with a coating of steel so infinitesimally deep, that it does not fill up the lightest scratch of the dry-point. During the printing it is this coating of steel, and *not* the copper, which has to bear the friction; and when the steel is worn through in any place it is easily removed by a solvent which does not hurt the copper, after which the plate may be re-steeled, and this may be repeated over and over again, so that immense editions of etchings may in these days be printed, without friction on the copper, only



on its thin steel coat. It follows, of course, that unless especial care is taken *not* to benefit by this discovery, the days of rare fine proofs in work done after this time are over. Everybody will be able to get good proofs of the work of etchers, just as everybody is able to get a correct edition of Scott or Byron. Now this discovery is hateful to lovers of etchings as curiosities, and altogether acceptable and delightful to true amateurs of art. A true amateur hates an impression from a worn plate, not because it is common, but because it is bad as art : the relations of tone having all gone wrong, and the most delicate lines being lost altogether ; but the curiosity-hunter hates worn impressions chiefly because they are common, and may be had of the low printsellers on the Quai des Augustins, at ten sous a-piece. The true amateur is glad of a discovery which will make good etchings cheap by mere multiplicity of good impressions, so that nobody will be tempted to exhaust a plate. Would it be a bad thing if there were a million perfect copies of Rembrandt's finest works ? Are there not a million copies of Hamlet, and do we value Shakspeare the less for his boundless publicity and illimitable possibility of reproduction ?

Amateurship, in the higher sense, means the state in which the love of art is chief, and everything else subordinate. In connoisseurship, knowledge is chief, and the pride of knowledge, love being subordinate or non-existent. The glory of connoisseurship is to have ascertained and to possess in perfect readiness many facts relating to work done by famous men ; and these facts have very often no connection whatever with artistic quality or natural truth. It is a great thing for a connoisseur, for instance, to know whether a plate is rare or common, a matter which, artistically, is of absolute indifference. Another great point in connoisseurship is to be aware of the indications by which different states are determined ; for instance, if in the first



state of a certain plate by Rembrandt the end hair in a dog's tail has a bur, and if in the second state this bur has been removed with the scraper, a professed connoisseur could scarcely avow his ignorance of the fact; whilst from the artistic point of view ignorance of such details is perfectly avowable, and is of no importance unless they seriously affect the artistic quality of the work. No amateur need be ashamed of not having the peculiar kind of knowledge which belongs to connoisseurs. When Providence ordained that there should be connoisseurs, it was with a view to the preservation of thousands of minute facts which the artistic class would have despised too much to treasure them for the benefit of mankind. As the mania for collecting curious things has rendered the general service of preserving much that is valuable as an illustration of the past, so the instinct which leads men to collect odd facts makes these men of use as living books of reference.

The good which connoisseurs do, is to hand down from generation to generation a mass of interesting traditions or discoveries about what has been done in art; the evil which they do is to produce a too general impression that this kind of knowledge is the knowledge of art itself. It cannot be too clearly stated or understood that a man may have immense artistic and critical acquaintance with some branch of the fine arts and yet not be a connoisseur at all; or he may be an accomplished connoisseur in the usual acceptance of the word, and yet have very little artistic or critical acquirement. You find connoisseurs, who really *are* connoisseurs—that is to say, they can tell you who did a thing and when, and give a shrewd guess as to the price it would be likely to fetch in the market—and yet these men can neither draw themselves, nor tell good drawing from bad when they see it. They recognise works of art as we recognise men's faces, without artistic study. They can tell the touch of an artist as we know the handwriting on the





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## CHAPTER V.

### *CRITICISM AND PRACTICAL WORK.*

**N**EITHER amateurship nor connoisseurship is necessarily critical. An amateur is merely a person who loves art, and a connoisseur is a person who knows one thing from another, which need not be on grounds of artistic merit. A critic requires other qualifications.

It has often been asserted that the labours of artist and theorist are incompatible, and that it is useless to attempt both. By an irresistible instinct, however, some men are driven to do both, and cannot endure to give up either, practice seeming to them to be enlightened and guided by theory, and theory to be most solidly grounded on practice. The two seem like the lame man and the blind man, theory being lame and practice blind; and the lame man in the saddle mounted upon the blind man's back, and they both got on well enough.

But it is true that artists, as they are generally constituted and educated, cannot be just critics, though their criticism is usually interesting if the necessary allowance is made, in each case, for the artist's point of view. The world of art is divided into many small states or cliques, each as violently prejudiced against the others as the common people in every nation are against foreigners. International criticism is valuable only if you never forget the nationality of the critic. Englishmen accuse the French of being extravagant and parsimonious in consecutive sentences, which only means that the French spend liberally where the English spend



little, and that by a necessary compensation the French are careful where the English are liberal. So if we consider artistic cliques as little nations, we shall find all pure artists national, and criticising other cliques in that national way. But the critic, in reference to cliques, must be cosmopolitan.

Now to be cosmopolitan in the true sense does not mean to be ignorant about what goes on in different nations. A swallow is not cosmopolitan because he flies over many lands; and yet the present tendency of thought about criticism is, that to avoid cliques and their narrowness it must be confided to men who are just as much outside of the art world as swallows are of the human world.

No person outside of practical art can criticise, and also no practical person living in a narrow clique can criticise justly. The true critic is a person who, having lived within the cliques and learned their languages, can get outside of them at any time by an effort of the will, and see them all at about the same distance from himself. He knows them from within, and he knows them from without, both kinds of knowledge being absolutely indispensable to justice.

It is one of the current commonplaces that the age we live in is great in criticism but not in art, and the present Lord Lytton made a capital fable about a certain hen and a weasel, the hen being the artist laying eggs, but in such dread of the weasel (the critic), that at last she grew confused in mind, and dreamed that she was the weasel himself, the consequences being as follows:—

This double identity made up of two—  
Her waking and sleeping self—at last,  
The hen's life into confusion threw  
And over it daily and nightly cast  
The spell of a two-fold trouble. By day  
She lived in such dread of her midnight dream  
That at length not an egg was she able to lay,  
Yet this daily sterility did not redeem



From its nightly plague her spirit tormented  
When she by the dream's transforming power  
Changed into a weasel, was discontented  
At finding no more any eggs to devour.

. . . . .  
So are we : who both author and critic in one  
Miss the comfort accorded to either alone.  
By alternate creative and critical powers  
Is our suffering identity sundered and torn.  
And the tooth of the critic that's in us devours  
Half the author's conceptions before they are born.

This is admirably well put, and there are cases of which it is quite true, but since it is our inevitable fate, as moderns, to become critical in one way or other, our only chance of safety lies in being critical with thoroughness of knowledge. There may have been unconscious artists in former times ; I doubt if there are any now ; the best of them I know combine, as George Eliot does, the artist and critic in one person, and are clearly conscious of what they are doing. It may be quite true that the critic in them devours half the author's conceptions before they are born, but as there is not time in an artist's life to realise more than about one-tenth of his conceptions, the only consequence is a more careful selection of the few that can be realised, and, notwithstanding their critical spirit, artists and authors are as prolific as ever, laying as many eggs as their predecessors, and hatching them too.

As artists on the one hand try to enlighten themselves by criticism, so the wisest and best of critics endeavour to get light through practical work. Labour of that kind is good because it shows us the technical limitations, and if the critical reader comes to understand etching thoroughly he may compel himself to a complete analysis by copying works by different great masters, not on paper, but on copper, and by forcing the copper to give the same results as the print before him. Such experiments open our eyes



more than any amount of time spent in turning over prints in a portfolio. They are study in the true sense of the word, and they have a good moral effect also, for they make us recognise the qualities of other men who were always different from ourselves, and in most cases superior to ourselves. Consider how valuable to a critic about to write upon Rembrandt, would be the experience of a practical kind which Flameng went through in copying many of his etchings! It would be half an education in itself.

Let us believe, what is assuredly true, that criticism and practice may work harmoniously together in the same mind if only they are wisely directed, and that the critical habit of the modern intellect does not inevitably lead us to sterility. Haydon is sometimes quoted as an example of the bad effects which the critical habit produces in an artist, but all his waste of effort was the consequence of *insufficient* critical culture. Had he possessed a truly critical culture he would have avoided the waste of energy which we deplore in him, and either produced art-work within the compass of his powers, or else directed them to other objects. So in a professed critic, Mr. Ruskin, much of what is good in his writing is due to his experience of practical art-work, and where he is not so strong the weakness may generally be traced to a deficiency of practical study. Thus he is strong on mountains and architecture, because he has drawn both a great deal, but not strong on figure-painting because he has drawn the figure very little.



## CHAPTER VI.

### *FAVOURABLE AND UNFAVOURABLE ARTISTIC CONDITIONS*

**SUCCESS** in etching is as much an affair of organisation as of artistic superiority. Rembrandt was not a greater artist than Phidias ; but Rembrandt was so constituted as to be the very type of etchers, their perfect representative, whereas we may be sure that if Phidias could have tried to etch he would have failed altogether.<sup>1</sup> So amongst living artists, some of the best of them have been unable to etch, though they have tried to do so, and some very imperfect artists have etched well. For example, James Whistler is a strikingly imperfect artist, but he is a fine etcher.

This may seem to imply that etching is an imperfect art, a notion I have already contended against. It only implies that etching is an art which pardons some imperfections in favour of some good qualities. The fact is, that the limits of Whistler as an artist are by no means the limits of the art of etching ; that what he does in it is good, but that also other things may be done in etching which are good, and that Whistler cannot do, and never will be able to do. But he has some of the qualities of a great etcher, and as to those qualities which he has not, their absence is not seriously felt, does not much interfere with our enjoyment of the artist's work. For it is the glory of etching that it never exacts

<sup>1</sup> Phidias might have used etching to multiply a sculptor's drawings, just as he might have used any other autographic process, but it is highly improbable that he would have developed any of the peculiar qualities of the art.



completion, never compels an artist to go farther than he safely can go. You must, of course, have certain positive qualities to be able to etch at all ; but if you have these, your want of other qualities is not likely to be painfully felt.

The conditions which are favourable and unfavourable to etching may be broadly divided under two heads. Lines of study which tend ultimately to *concentration* are so far favourable ; lines of study which tend to *elaboration* are unfavourable.<sup>1</sup> It does not signify by how much elaboration your early studies may pass, if they tend steadily to concentration, because you may make very elaborate studies indeed with the deliberate aim of learning how to concentrate powerfully. Some of the most powerful masters of concentration have begun by working elaborately, and gradually eliminated unnecessary detail, till, by a long labour of thoughtful omission, they arrived at length at such summary ways of work as best suit the purposes of etching. All that has to be insisted upon is the tendency of an artist's mind and work, not so much what he is doing at any particular time.

Industry cannot make an etcher ; it is a question of temperament, with some industry to give manual skill. Slow and timid temperaments are naturally disqualified for an art which exacts decision. You may know from the pictures of an artist whether he has a chance of becoming an etcher. French painters usually etch sooner and better than Germans ; and the English, as might be expected, have facilities which lie somewhere between the two. The French have a true conception of etching as a rapid and comprehensive art ; but when, as often happens, there is no genuine individual faculty, they fall into emptiness and idle scrawl-

<sup>1</sup> There *are* elaborate etchings which are also good ones, but these are rare, and the words in the text are left for their general truth. Besides, even in the most elaborate plates there are always passages of rapid and concentrated expression, quite beyond the powers of a slow, undecided mind.



ing. The Germans and English usually fail in another way. When a Frenchman cannot etch, he flourishes about on the copper with vain efforts at brilliance and freedom ; when a German cannot etch, he elaborates the most highly-finished and ridiculous compositions. The English have hitherto preferred to fail after the German manner ; but it is probable that since the influence of French ideas has been brought to bear upon us, our bad etchers will fail rather in emptiness of the rapid than the elaborate kind. It signifies nothing whether empty work is rapid or elaborate, for in both cases it is equally worthless ; but the French deserve some credit for seeing in a dim way what ought to be aimed at, and the Germans are a little to blame for their wonderful want of perception of the best qualities of the process.

Sixteen years ago, when our painters were tending to elaboration of the pre-Raphaelite kind, they were going in a direction not likely to qualify them for etching. Now, when they are painting more and more on the principles of abstraction, they are going towards that condition of mind in which men etch well.

It deeply concerns an artist's personal comfort whether, if he attempts to etch, he is so constituted as to be able to etch well naturally. No art is more discouraging to the unqualified aspirant. Etching looks so delightfully easy, that the disappointment at failure is proportionate to the firm confidence in success. A man can draw well, and paint agreeably, so he believes that he will soon be able to etch ; and he *does* etch, but somehow nothing that he executes seems to have the right degree of life in it ; it is life entangled with rigid sinews of death, and veins in which the blood is coagulated and cold. This is because his artistic constitution does not easily throw off dead and superfluous matter. It throws it off ultimately, or he could not paint, but it does not get rid of it easily and at once ; and therefore, for etching, it does not get rid of it in time.





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light and shade, it forgets the right accentuation of form, then there will be so much the less of that brilliance and life on which the power of etching so largely depends.

There is the greater need to insist upon comprehensiveness that our painters are not generally remarkable for the possession of it. They too often study things one after another instead of seeing them all at once ; and the art of seeing many things at once is as essential to harmony in painting as the corresponding faculty of hearing many sounds at the same time is to the enjoyment of harmony in music. It is not enough to see the leaf, or even the branch, or the whole tree ; we must grasp the entire landscape, or we are powerless. Our artists do sometimes grasp their subjects largely, and then they might succeed if they were not deterred by the feeling that what is called "finish" is indispensable ; whereas this finish, when it consists in mere elaboration of parts, is irretrievable ruin. The study of etching may have the happiest influence on the progress of painting itself, for it leads to a conviction that comprehensiveness is the first of artistic necessities. The artist who has it, and keeps it, may add much else to it that is worth having—much delicate and minute observation, much craft of arrangement and subtlety of hand. But for the painter or etcher who has it not, whatever his other attainments, they are of little value, because they can never display themselves in the right time and place ; but, like the reminiscences of people without tact, are always brought upon the *tapis* when they can create nothing but irritation.

.So long as we refer to etching alone, we cannot prove the full value of the great qualities on which success in etching depends. A great etching is the product of a grandly constituted mind ; every stroke of it has value exactly proportionate to the mental capacity of the artist ; so that a treatise on etching is necessarily a treatise on the mental powers of great men.



Not every reader would see at a glance whether all work was comprehensive or not, but most men know what comprehensiveness is in other departments of human endeavour. It is the faculty of seeing things in their just relations, the faculty which checks our constant tendency to absorption in narrowing specialities. It keeps our work in due proportion, by constantly reminding us of the true extent of its great field, for it embraces the whole field with its wide vision. We are always tempted to settle in some pleasant nook or corner of our possessions and leave the rest uncultivated ; but if we have comprehensiveness, it will not allow us to do this. The most striking characteristic of the comprehensive intellect is its tolerance of necessary local evils and imperfections, its anxiety for great results only, and carelessness of partial success. It is the faculty of generalship, which knows that no battle can be won without sacrifice, and consciously pays a price for its victories.

In ordinary life much of the narrowness that leads to intolerance and Philistinism comes from the weakness of this faculty. This narrowness is the essence of provincialism, of the prejudices of caste, of that kind of patriotism which is only the provincial spirit on a larger scale. In literature, the want of comprehensiveness leads to an infinite amount of wordy controversy. A hundred writers see a hundred aspects of the truth, and each copiously argues that his own view is the only view worth considering. Want of comprehensiveness is, however, of less consequence in current literature, especially in periodical literature, than in the fine arts, because unity is less necessary in articles than in pictures, or statues, or etchings. Many articles serve the useful purpose of drawing attention to the subjects they treat of, without being in themselves proportioned works of art ; they are merely the talk of the day, well expressed and widely circulated. But a picture or an etching is more than this, or at least aspires to be more. It aspires to have artistic value ;



and there is no artistic value without unity, and unity is the result of comprehensiveness.

But may not unity come from a certain narrowness also ? May not the comprehensive intellect, which is alive to so many aspects of things, introduce the fruits of too various observations, and end by producing discord out of its very opulence ?

This danger exists so long as an intellect is *becoming* comprehensive, because, in this condition of gradual extension, the newest acquisition always has an exaggerated importance, and is likely to be displayed and insisted upon disproportionately, and even out of season. And there is a narrowness which ensures a relative and unenviable safety ; but we are not the less bound to urge the desirableness of cultivating a large and comprehensive spirit. Above all, it should be well understood that etching is not, as some imagine, a fit pastime for small minds ; but that, on the contrary, its great glory is to offer the means of powerful and summary expression to the largest. And we may be assured that for a brief expression to be powerful it must be concentrated from large masses of acquired knowledge. I know not how many roses are needed for one small phial of precious attar, but I know that there rises from every good etching such a perfume of concentrated thought that a million flowers must have bloomed for it in the garden of some fertile and cultivated mind.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### *ABSTRACTION.*

**ETCHING** does not proceed so much by abstraction as by comprehensive selection ; but abstraction has some place in the art, nevertheless, and is to be admitted frankly on certain occasions, and in a modified way very generally.

To understand what abstraction in art is, little more is necessary than a reference to ancient sculpture and design, especially Assyrian or Egyptian. That abstraction was instinctive, and therefore in the best periods as much above criticism as the instinctive labours of the lower animals. What the Egyptian and the Assyrian both did, and what even the more thoughtful Greek did also, though in a more beautiful way, was to take certain facts of nature and leave the rest. The facts which were taken were then treated arbitrarily, or according to the dictates of fixed customs. The facts which were left were no more regarded than if they had never existed.

Abstraction may be of the most opposite kinds. There is the abstraction of a Greek vase, and the abstraction of a blot by David Cox. In the first, outline is the truth preserved, and effect the truth sacrificed ; in the second, outline is sacrificed and effect preserved. And there are abstractions within abstraction. Thus, in outline work, we may purposely eliminate all lines that are expressive of softness and feebleness, so as to give a character of severity to our work ; or we may eliminate the lines of strength, and lend a yet greater languor to those of tenderness and voluptuous-



ness. And in the modern blot for effect we may be taking one set of tones or another, since complete imitation of tones is as impossible as complete imitation of lines, and artists take what they want of each, and that only.

Now the kinds of abstraction commonly resorted to in etching are two. First, when an etcher knows that his art cannot really imitate, he resorts to abstraction, and boldly interprets. Secondly, when he could get nearer to imitation if he chose to spend the time, but does not choose, then also he works in an abstract manner.

If there is a strong probability that your technical skill will not carry you through some difficult bit of imitation, give us rather a piece of abstraction, however rude, which may show that you have understood the thing to be rendered. In the works of great etchers there is every conceivable shade of gradation, from the most marvellous imitation to the strongest abstraction. Even in the same plate we may often trace varieties of this kind.<sup>1</sup> Imitative finish may be given to some central point of interest, and the execution of the rest of the work may become more and more frankly abstract till it reaches, in the outline of some cloud or distance, an abstraction as great in its way as that of an Assyrian bas-relief.

<sup>1</sup> A very remarkable and well-known instance of this is Rembrandt's famous Hundred Guilder Print. The figures in the centre and those to the right are wrought on principles of mingled imitation and abstraction, certain details, as, for instance, the near arm and hand of the praying figure close to Jesus, being almost purely imitative; but in the figures to the spectator's left the principle of abstraction predominates, and to such a degree that a child's head is drawn in pure outline, and five or six strokes of the point are made to do duty (very efficiently) for a man's beard. Rembrandt's work generally is a sort of play between the extremes of imitation and abstraction, the degree of either that he chose to give being dependent on his own momentary caprice—a caprice, however, that was generally influenced by subtle artistic considerations. For example, in the etching just referred to, Rembrandt used much abstraction in the figures to the left, because it permitted him to leave a great deal of white paper as a contrast to the dark shades on the right of the composition, and by this artifice he gained much breadth.



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Abstraction does not appear to be a rare power. Every body is in the habit of exercising it in common life. It is a common means of making things intelligible, and abstract drawing is usually more intelligible to uneducated persons, than the art which attempts a full rendering of nature. When we teach children to draw, we begin, as the Egyptians did, with rude, firm outlines; when we narrate events to simple people, we follow the same method, and purposely leave out all delicate and complicated considerations. It is not the abstraction of etching that makes it unintelligible to the people, but the complexity of the truths which it attempts to interpret simultaneously. A strong outline that goes all round its subject, though to the feeling of an etcher usually detestable, would be easily understood, but a fragmentary line which only indicates a quarter of a contour, and that probably not the real contour after all, and which hints half-a-dozen things, is likely, in the eyes of most people, to mean exactly nothing.



## CHAPTER IX.

### *SELECTION.*

**A**BSTRACTION is, of course, a kind of selection, but it is not the kind of selection that I desire to speak of here.

Abstraction is too analytic a selection for our present purpose. The artist who abstracts does not make a summary of the whole truth before him, but takes out a truth, and sets it forth in as evident a way as he possibly can, in a much more evident way than nature's. He acts as an anatomist who, having killed a wild animal for the sake of its skeleton only, tore away every fibre of muscle and threw it to his dogs; after which he set himself to clean the bones by boiling them, and, being installed in his museum, erected his white and perfect bone structure without a thought of the flesh that the dogs devoured. This is abstraction—a process of analysis followed by many rejections and few reserves.

The selection of which I would now speak is synthetic, and its object is to remain synthetic to the utmost possible extent. It does not try to detach one truth from its fellows, but to give the sum of all the truths. By means of this synthetic selection a master in etching will fully convey the ideas of structure, of light and shade, and of local colour, with the same set of touches. The more complex the expression, and the simpler the means used, the greater will be the power of the master.

In the infinite treasuries of natural truth some orders of





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All that can be done, all that in such a treatise as this any writer can be expected to do, is to remind readers if they know it already, and tell them if they do not, that this selection is essential to all good etching, this lordly and high choice, which is authorised by the most comprehensive knowledge of the wealth of nature.

But selection, I may be told, even selection of this synthetic kind, is equally necessary in painting, and therefore need not be treated of here, in a book devoted to what belongs peculiarly to etching. It is necessary in all painting, except in the abstract schools which reject it in favour of abstraction, but it is far more important, relatively to other qualities, in this more rapid and summary art of etching. If a painter cannot select at once, he gets the superfluities out of his work by a slow and painful process, like a long malady, or hides them under equally superfluous elaboration. But an etcher who cannot select rapidly is lost.



# CHAPTER X.

## *SENSITIVENESS.*

**I** FIND that great etchers are decidedly a more sensitive body of men than line engravers, and more generally sensitive than some celebrated painters. Certain schools of painting have definitely encouraged insensitiveness to whole orders of truth, under the pretext of style ; but etching, being an obscure and neglected art, has fortunately been too much despised by the professors of the grand style to be very actively injured by them. If any student, however, chooses to take Agostino Caracci for his model, he may, no doubt, arrive at insensitiveness even in etching.

Sensitiveness in ordinary life is so often spoken of as a weakness or a fault, so often attributed to morbid conditions, that it is needful to claim a right consideration for a kind of sensitiveness, which is neither a fault, nor a weakness, nor a disease. The work of the great men is usually at the same time both exquisitely sensitive, and capable of demonstrations of strength so overpowering, that it seems brutal to minds which have neither its tenderness nor its force. The softer intellects are not rough in this noble way, and so they resent the strong markings of the great etchers as a kind of affront to their own refinement ; but, on the other hand, neither have they the etcher's exquisite sensitiveness, and though it does not irritate them as the apparent coarseness does, it gets no recognition from them, and remains outside their estimate of the artist.

Whoever aspires to be an etcher should try to be sensi-



tive in the best sense. True sensitiveness is not disease, but the highest life of the purest health. It is easily lost, in the turmoil of the common world, or so far injured as to leave nothing but an occasional capability of noble pleasure. How are we to keep it if we have it? It may be lost in too busy intercourse with men, but so also it dies in the dull apathy of long solitude, and the Shepherd on Ben Cruachan has as little of it as the apprentice in the Strand. Its most fatal enemies are over-stimulus and deficiency of stimulus.

In great capitals, the over-stimulus comes in a hundred forms. One very injurious form of it is too many pictures and prints. We will not rail against exhibitions, since they are inevitable, and the best method hitherto devised for the publication of new paintings; but it is well to guard ourselves against the invasion of mere quantity. No man living can really study more than ten fresh works of art a day; he may glance at more in order to select the ten, but he cannot study more. Who would expect any one to read more than ten volumes a day? And is there not as much in a painting or etching that really deserves to be studied as in most volumes? Londoners and Parisians seem to have extensive views of the quantity of art a man may digest in a given time; and so far as I have been able to calculate, they expect a critic to make up his mind on two hundred pictures per day, with a stiff volume on æsthetics, and a new book-illustrator every evening.

Errors in this direction may be avoided if we remember that the mind has a digestion just as the body has, and that it can only take in a certain limited quantity of aliment in the twenty-four hours. Excesses are paid for by a loss of tone, a loss of sensitiveness, a loss of appetite. Then both art and nature lose their charm, and good work cannot even be enjoyed, far less executed.

In the country, on the other hand, from the want of fresh



stimulus in the sufficiently frequent sight of new works, people fall into that mortal dulness which is one of the well-known marks of provincialism. It is admitted amongst artists that no painter can absent himself very long from capital cities without declining in power ; and even landscape painters, whose material lies in Alpine valleys or Highland glens, pass regularly some considerable portion of the year in the ugliest capital in Europe.

The best life is that which includes both town and country, and does not in either allow itself to be invaded and overwhelmed by quantity, either of art or nature. The powers of one man in the presence of the immense accumulations of the race must always be infinitely little, and an individual human being can no more study all the art in the world than he can eat all the food in the world. Etching is a pleasanter study in this respect of quantity than painting is, for the number of etchers is limited ; and since the art has never received great encouragement, few artists have left great quantities of etchings behind them. The danger to the sensitiveness of etchers is not so much from seeing too many etchings as too many pictures.

In beautiful scenery the faculties may be dulled by too much nature, as well as too much art. Amongst great mountains we are especially exposed to a spirit of reverie, which makes us gaze for ever and do nothing. What we can do seems so little, what they *are* so much, that we are likely to fall into contemplative indolence, unless roused by the ardour of scientific research, or the necessity for money-getting. Neither of these motives leads to the study of etching, and there is always some probability that an etcher who should persistently absent himself from fine collections, and live in the midst of a too magnificent nature, would injure his artistic sensitiveness, by too much stimulus of the one kind and too little of the other.



# CHAPTER XI.

## *EMPHASIS.*

**I**N all human communication, when there is energy enough to move men, there is emphasis—in oratory, in literature, in acting, in painting, in common daily talk, in music, even in the pantomime of gesture.

~ All emphasis in design is, and must be, a departure from the rigid truth. Emphasis with pencil or etching needle is the exaggeration of some point which has powerfully struck the artist, or to which he intends to direct the attention of the spectator. And such exaggerations are departures from the truth in more ways than one; they obscure other facts, and destroy the equilibrium of nature. Yet a design without emphasis would be uninteresting, except as a curiosity; it would certainly have no interest as art. Any human communication in which the strict order and proportion of nature should be followed would fail of its effect upon mankind. The principle is, that you are not to tell mankind all that has occurred, but what it concerns them to know. Now in every event of history, and in every natural scene, there are millions of minute facts which nobody cares about or needs to care about—facts which, if narrated, would only overcharge the hearer's memory uselessly, and hinder him from giving due attention to the great points. Your time and his being limited, you tell him what seems to you of most importance; and to impress this on his mind you drive it home with a hearty thrust of emphasis, like a man charging a gun. Artists do exactly the same thing, and etchers especially, for a par-



ticular reason. The more elaborate a work is, the less, as a general rule, is emphasis resorted to because when there is time to make a full exposition of a matter, there is the less need for violence in statement. If you have to reply to an adversary in one sentence, you make it a biting epigram; if you have an hour before you, it tells better to demolish him with studied moderation. Now the etchers, in comparison to the painters, are not accustomed to lengthy utterances. To be brief and go to the point at once is a quality which they aim at. This brevity naturally leads to an emphatic manner of work, and it may be observed that the same etcher who strongly emphasizes in a rapid sketch on the copper is far more sober in statement when he works on a laboured plate.

But there is a kind of emphasis, necessary to all etching, even the most laboured, and which readily escapes attention. It is the delicate accentuation that lives in every stroke, like the caressing bow-pressures of an accomplished violinist. You think there is no emphasis at all, that the etcher has been telling you plain facts in a plain way, and yet you have been interested and pleased. If you have been interested, it is quite certain that there must have been emphasis; the simple truth would have left you cold. And yet you are interested in nature, and there is no emphasis *there*. Very true, but there was emphasis in the way you looked at nature; your emotion supplied then what the emotion of the artist must supply for you in art.

And might not a spectator's emotion in the presence of a literally true etching supply a kind of emphasis also, as it would before nature?

It might perhaps, but it never does. No strictly accurate drawing that I have ever seen has had the power to move a single spectator. Accurate work—that is, work without emphasis—is always passed by with indifference. It does not tell men what to look for, or why they are to look at all, and so they do not feel under any obligation to look. An



artist is a person who undertakes, or ought to undertake, to establish a human communication between nature and mankind ; and all good human communication is preceded by selection and enforced by emphasis.

Yet we must not be too emphatic. With cultivated people the most effectual emphasis is very subtle and delicate, avoiding violence, and seeming rather to arise from the courteous wish to spare trouble to the audience, than from any eagerness to compel attention. If an artist will listen to the best conversation that is to be had, and also to the best music, he may safely carry so much emphasis as he will have heard there into his own practice. There is a difference between such just and necessary stress as this and the violence of bad manners and bad art.





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in landscape, have never produced a good etcher. Of course neither of these schools set itself to the suppression of *all* passion, for the classical designers have illustrated scenes of very strong passion indeed, and even the topographic landscape painters have, or had at the beginning, a passionate devotion to topographic truth; but they have both encouraged a cold indifference to much that no etcher can afford to regard coldly. The classical figure-painters, in the pursuit of a learned ideal, taught themselves to despise the aspects of the common world, and to this day have a lofty contempt for every artist who is humble enough and intelligent enough to take an interest in it. The topographers, on the other hand, though they make an exception in favour of Turner, whose genius they recognise, regard the deviations from literal truth which, in the works of less famous painters, are due to genuine passion, as a want of conscientiousness and a blamable laxity of principle.

The student who desires to etch is earnestly recommended to keep clear of all doctrine which endeavours to chill his feeling in any way. To etch well, an artist hardly *can* be too passionate in his likings. Etch what impresses you, and *as* it impresses you, and let no theorists poison your mind with the virus of a morbid conscientiousness.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### *FRANKNESS.*

**ETCHING** is eminently a straightforward art, which is one great reason for its unpopularity. People do not like plain lines that tell rude truths ; they prefer fancy arrangements. No good etcher will condescend to fancy arrangements.

The delightfulness of etching, to us who care for it, is especially this frankness. No art is so entirely honest ; painting and engraving have almost always some questionable ingredient of attractiveness, some prettiness or polish to suit widespread but lamentable tastes. The etchers, with few exceptions, have not attempted to make themselves agreeable in this way, probably from a conviction that their art is so inherently unpopular that it would be of no use. The consequence is, that of all artists they are the most simple and direct. They are as cunning, and crafty, and subtle as you will in the artifices of method, but it is an honest cunning that aims only at qualities really worth having ; and if these can be reached in a simple way, the simple way is always preferred. In saying that etching is an especially honest art, I mean that it does not resort to apparently difficult ways of doing easy things, in order to get credit for difficulties overcome. On the contrary, it is remarkable for preferring apparently simple ways of doing difficult things. So unpretending is it, that the masterpieces of the art attract no attention from the general public, and people who cluster in a close group round a showy



picture, will pass without a glance the most exquisite expression of an aquafortist.

Etched lines look coarse and awkward very often, the lines of shading seem irregular, pains are not taken to hide the errors of the artist ; sometimes he roughly corrects, and lets you see that he has corrected. It happens even that defects in the varnish have been allowed to remain in the bitten copper, and print themselves on every proof taken. Etchers seem to be an idle, careless set of men, who do not finish properly. They are not sufficiently polished, not in harmony with the usages of society. These wayward, eccentric strokes of theirs show a too rampant and irrepressible individualism ; if they would learn to shade evenly as the engravers do, and make neat curves and lozenges, would it not be much better ? Frankness may be well on due occasion, but we may have too much of it.

This is the way many people feel about the frankness of etching, if they do not say so.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### *SPEED.*

**I**N the letterpress which accompanied Mr. Haden's etchings a letter of his was quoted, in which he spoke of the advantages of etching an entire plate at one sitting. The unity of impression so obtained was, Mr. Haden thought, an important gain, and enough to counterbalance much elaboration. Looking through Mr. Haden's own etchings by the light of this expression of opinion, we find some which may have been finished at one sitting, and others which must have required a longer time. It will be found in practice that a sketch on copper may be effectively done in a sitting, but that an etching in which the full resources of the process are brought to bear will occupy several sittings. It may be also observed that when an etching, supposed to be executed at once, is afterwards corrected and carried through several states, the sittings required for these corrections ought to be taken into account, and that it is not accurate to class such a plate amongst plates etched at one sitting. If this is strictly attended to, it will be found that an exceedingly small proportion of etchings have really been executed in the way Mr. Haden advocates.

It is right, however, to insist on a certain value in mere rapidity. A rapid stroke, when not so rapid as to miss the necessary modulations, is generally better than a slow one, and a concise expression preferable to a diffuse expres-



sion.\* The way to attain true speed is to spend a great deal of time in looking, and having decided upon the strokes to be laid, lay them at once, and leave them. It is told of John Phillip, that when he painted he showed no sign of hurry, but would look hard at nature and then lay a few firm touches, not to be disturbed, and that in this careful way he was really getting his picture forward rapidly. So in etching, there should be no unthinking haste, but every line should be determined upon before it is made.

A good principle to remember is, that for an etching to look fresh we must avoid weariness. This is why Mr. Haden recommends a single sitting; it seems to him that the freshness of the mind, its first virgin impression of a subject, may be kept three or four hours, but not very much longer. Before the mind acknowledges fatigue it loses its keen interest in the subject which occupies it, and this keen interest is what we have mainly to rely upon for the vivacity of our work. A jaded etcher is sure to spoil his plate. Without making a rule to etch only plates of one sitting, which would confine us to sketching, it is quite necessary to stop before the mind wanders or goes on another tack. The plate, if not yet sufficiently advanced to be printed, may be laid aside and completed at some future time, when the freshness of

\* Every question about art has two sides, and this question about speed is not an exception to the rule. There are qualities which come of speed and qualities which come of deliberation. However, there is such a thing as deliberate speed, and I should never advocate any other.

Rembrandt gives examples of all degrees of speed and all degrees of deliberate slowness too. Sometimes he aims at the qualities that rapidity attains when directed by knowledge and genius, sometimes at the qualities that infinite patience may attain under the same high mental guidance. The great versatility of etching permits the most opposite treatment. Your work may be as swift as handwriting, or it may be as slow as the progress of an engraver's burin; good work has been done in both ways. I should say, never work quickly from bravado, nor slowly from an exaggerated conscientiousness, but choose the rapid or slow expression as it harmonises with your temper and accommodates itself to your thought.



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interest in it may return to us. If this freshness should not return, the plate is better abandoned.\*

\* Landseer attached as much importance to speed in painting as some etchers have attached to it in their own art. He painted quickly on principle, and settled everything about his composition before going to work, spending marvellously little time in the actual setting forth of his ideas upon canvas. He was fully alive to the fact that rapidity is a good thing in itself, provided only you have knowledge enough, and provided that the knowledge is at your fingers' ends. After one of his amazing feats of speed he felt a profound satisfaction, not in the half-miraculous achievement, but in having got his thought well expressed whilst it remained fresh and vivid in his mind.



## CHAPTER XV.

### *MOTIVES.*

**T**HE motive of a picture is not so much material as spiritual. It is a certain condition of the mind, produced by the subject, and which the artist, in rendering that subject, desires to reproduce in the minds of spectators. This is the reason why great artists so often choose subjects which seem trifling, and also why Philistinism always misunderstands and despises art. What a great landscape-painter attempts to render is not the natural landscape, but the state of feeling which the landscape produces in himself. Since etching is especially an art of *feeling*, an art in which feeling is supreme and mechanism nowhere, it is very important that the etcher should be able to enter into the true conception of artistic motives.

A motive should never be valued according to the popular estimate of its importance, nor even by the effect it may produce on some other artist. If you listen to the people, you may be prevented from studying in some region quite full of good motives ; it seems barren and uninteresting to them, and they will make you believe that it is barren. So even an accomplished artist may mislead you by his report of a place ; he may find nothing there suitable to his own idiosyncrasy, and yet for you it may be full of treasure. The converse of this is also true, though not quite to the same extent. A district may be popular, it may even be very attractive to some good painters, and yet you may not find there what you want. This, however, is likely to occur





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motives which are only subjects. There are endless beauties and sublimities which do not make our innermost chords vibrate ; we just admire them, and that is all. The condition of mind which tries to etch a subject from a cool acknowledgment that it is good material, is as widely remote from the condition of a noble etcher as flirtation from passionate love.

This faith in our own personality is not vanity, it is not a blamable excess of self-confidence, but merely a right understanding of the necessities of art. It may even arise from a kind of modesty which will not attempt things out of its own province. There is a close connection between true modesty and self-respect, and etchers ought to cultivate both. They should have modesty enough to hinder them from attempting things merely from ambition, because other men have done them and become famous ; and they should have self-respect enough to have a full though quiet conviction of the value of their own feelings and impressions. In this state of mind an artist finds something more and better than mere subjects, and nature abounds for him in motives.



# ETCHING AND ETCHERS.

## BOOK II.

### *THE DUTCH AND OTHER SCHOOLS.*









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There is a quality in all Durer's work which gives it inexhaustible interest ; it always makes us feel that we have not yet got to the bottom of it, that there are meanings in it deeper than any we have yet read, and that closer and more intelligent study will be rewarded by farther knowledge and fuller enjoyment. His intense seriousness, his powerful and somewhat morbid imagination, gave him a tendency to philosophical and poetical suggestion somewhat beyond the range of graphic art. It is easy to propose solutions of Durer's enigmas, but what he really intended, in some of his most elaborate plates, will perhaps remain for ever a mystery. Who knows what was in Durer's mind when he engraved the "Great Horse"? Certainly his purpose was not simply the designing of a muscular quadruped.

It would not be difficult for a writer who, for many years, has loved and studied the noble work of Durer, to occupy several pages with the expression of his long-accumulating thought ; but any elaborate study of this master would be out of place here, because it would have to be based upon his engravings, and not upon his etchings. Even of the etchings themselves it would be an affectation to say very much beyond this, that they are right in workmanship, and as good in conception as the artist's other religious pieces. It was not in the conception of scenes of sacred history that Durer far surpassed his contemporaries.

*St. Jerome.*—The saint is seated in a rocky place, with a book before him on a rude table made with a board placed upon stones ; there is a lion at his feet and a little water. (Dated 1512.)

*The Virgin and Child.*—The Virgin is seated on the edge of a rude trough filled with hay or straw. To her left is an old man with a long beard, and behind her are three figures—a woman and two men. The reader will find a very rich impression of this etching in the British Museum the *upper* proof on page 18 of the Durer volume there.



## CHAPTER II.

### *REMBRANDT.*

**E**VERY art has its great representative master, and the representative etcher is Rembrandt. He was so constituted, and he so trained himself, as to become, in his maturity, the most consummate aquafortist who has hitherto appeared. There is, however, a difficulty in writing about him which does not present itself in the case of less celebrated artists; he has been made the subject of such unlimited eulogy, that the sincere expression of critical appreciation must seem faint and pale after the ardours of genuine or affected fanaticism. Rembrandt is what the French call a god of art. The phrase sounds a little blasphemous to English ears; but, whether blasphemous or not, it describes with perfect accuracy the relation of certain famous artists towards their admirers. Rembrandt and one or two others are in a very strict sense the gods of connoisseurs, and the kind of homage they receive is not critical, but has the nature of worship or adoration. After that the critic has a discouraging task before him, for however loud his praise, it is inaudible in the unceasing chorus of traditional hymn-singing; and however mild the expression of a doubt, it is likely to be resented as a species of atheism. False enthusiasm of all kinds is often considerably noisier than true enthusiasm; and it is not easy for a critic, whose admiration is only based on careful study of the works of an artist, to emulate the ardour of those who have never studied him at all.\* Considering, therefore, that no-

\* The enthusiasm about the classical writers (not merely Latin and Greek, but



thing in the way of phrase-making can be expected to equal what has been accomplished already in honour of the name of Rembrandt, the present writer abandons the rhetoric of eulogy to more adventurous and enterprising authors, and confines himself to a simple analysis of Rembrandt's qualities and powers.

Technical skill is not the highest gift of an artist, but it is his most necessary accomplishment, for without it he cannot worthily realise his conceptions, however elevated. This is a truism, and has been said before in various ways, but it may be well to say it in this place once again, because Rembrandt holds his supreme rank primarily on technical grounds. Let us, for the present, set aside the question of his intellectual power, and reserve considerations of taste, inquiring simply whether he could really etch, or whether his work, like that of many other clever painters who have etched, is foreign to the true genius of the art.

A great French painter gave this counsel to his pupils : "*Ébauchez toujours.*" Our English art language is so limited that we cannot translate the word *ébaucher*, which means the preparatory brushing-in of a picture ; but what the painter intended to recommend was the practice of carrying forward the picture, always on the same principle of comprehensive sketching, until at last it reached a sufficient completion, being brought to it insensibly, as it were, and without any fixed intention of finish ; the finish coming of itself after much sketching upon and within sketching. The advice was excellent, even as addressed to painters ; but etchers need a like belief even more urgently. An etching should always be conceived purely as a sketch, and what people call a "finished" etching ought to be nothing more than a sketch carried farther. Rembrandt was always technically safe

of all countries) is always loudest in the case of persons who read them little or not at all, on the same principle, it may be supposed, which makes religious bigotry most energetic in those who expend little energy in the direction of moral effort.





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and used them sometimes in the same plate, passing with subtle gradation from one to the other, as it suited him, and so leading us to dwell upon what he considered best worth our study.

So that, if we take the whole series of the plates of Rembrandt, we shall find separate illustrations of sketching in all degrees of abstraction ; and also, if we take certain particular plates, we shall find in each of them a concentration of these various interpretations of nature ; but, however near the apparent approach to "finish," the most elaborate work is still pure sketching.

Another point which distinguishes Rembrandt from many inferior aquafortists, is his manly use, on due occasion, of the frank etched line. He knew the beauty and the value of it, and was so far from trying to dissimulate it in deference to popular taste, that he laid it boldly and bare wherever he saw the need of it, even in his most careful and elaborate performances. There is only one Englishman, Haden, who has used the line in this direct, effectual way, and Rembrandt taught him. Turner could use it, also, but he looked always to mezzotint to help him out. Of modern Frenchmen, Lalanne, Appian, Chiffart, Jongkind, and Daubigny employ the free line with various degrees of success, but no one has ever yet used it like Rembrandt ; and in this respect even the greatest of the old masters are feeble in comparison with him—all, except Vandyke.

He was very various in method, so that some amateurs, in ignorance of the usual processes of the art, have attributed to him secrets peculiar to himself. There is no evidence, however, that Rembrandt did more than employ the processes known to all etchers, and the peculiarity of his work was not a peculiarity of method, but a surpassing excellence of skill. So little is generally known about etching, that men who have a reputation for connoisseurship are sometimes unacquainted with the details of practice, so that the little



artifices of method, which any one may learn who will take the trouble, appear to them mysterious and inexplicable. It may be well to guard the reader against a mistake to which he may be exposed in reading French criticisms of Rembrandt, in which some impressions of his plates are said to be in the *manière noire*, a phrase commonly employed for mezzotint. Rembrandt never engraved in mezzotint, but he sometimes, in printing a plate, left ink on its surface so as to give a certain richness which bears some resemblance to mezzotint; and the *manière noire* of the French writers refers, in the case of Rembrandt, simply to this way of printing.

It is not always easy to say positively of small portions of Rembrandt's work, whether it was done with the etching-needle or the dry-point; and this proves an extraordinary mastery of the latter instrument, which in less skilful hands cannot approach the freedom of the needle. In these cases the way to ascertain the fact is by reference to the earliest proofs, before Rembrandt had removed his bur.

The criticism most interesting to general readers is that which refers to mental rather than technical characteristics, and it would be wrong not to attempt some estimate of Rembrandt as a mind studying nature and humanity. He was a robust genius, with keen powers of observation, but little delicacy or tenderness of sentiment, and he lacked the feminine element which is said to be necessary to poets. He understood certain classes of men quite thoroughly, and drew them with the utmost perspicacity—men with whom his robust nature had sympathy. He had an extraordinary apprehension of natural dignity and majesty, proving thereby the true grandeur of his own mind, for it is only minds of a very high order that see the grandeur of men who enjoy little worldly rank and consideration. Rembrandt had little sensitiveness, it seems, as regards the delicate beauty of young women, but he understood—and this is rarer—the



venerableness of some old ones. He drew a great many Biblical subjects, and a few very immoral ones ; whether he was religious or not is uncertain ; it is possible that he may have availed himself of the Bible as a convenient repertory of material, full of fine artistic suggestion, and having the advantage of being universally known. On the other hand, though there is undeniable licentiousness in some of his etchings, his mind does not seem to have dwelt much upon subjects of that kind, and he took them probably merely because they came in his way, as incidents of human life—a state of feeling which the scrupulous reticence of our age may easily misinterpret. He cared very little for beauty and grace, despised prettiness, calmly tolerated all manner of hideousness, and admired nothing so much as a certain stern and manly grandeur, resulting from the combination of habits of reflection and much experience of the world.

The doctrine that great artists are the product of the circumstances that surround them, has been so much insisted upon of late, that the reader will easily see the applicability of it to Rembrandt as an etcher. The visible marks of character in the men he knew were so strongly traced, and their whole aspect so available for his purpose, that he had the advantage of continual study, even in the common intercourse of life. A Londoner in the nineteenth century misses this, unless he is a caricaturist, for the activity of modern existence is destructive of the kind of dignity which Rembrandt loved, and our costume is not compatible with any true grandeur of demeanour. A still worse evil than our fidgetty activity and mean costume, is the want of clear individuality in our faces : we are trained in the repression of all visible feeling beyond a small range of polite and exceedingly mild emotions, so that our joy never gets beyond a smile of quiet satisfaction, nor may our sorrows command more than a gentle expression of regret. But Rembrandt lived in a time when people bore upon their faces a frank





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especial effect, because it was at one time proposed to illustrate this volume by means of photographs from the great etchers, but the quality of photographic reproductions generally was found so unreliable as to technical merits, that the plan was finally abandoned.\* When the photograph from an etching is placed side by side with the original, it is found wanting in clearness and purity of line ; the lines occasionally fail where most delicate, and passages of close but still open shading are represented by something like a washed or blotted tint. On the other hand, no etched copy is to be absolutely relied upon, though some very wonderful imitations exist—imitations whose Chinese fidelity deceives all but the most accomplished connoisseurs. Notwithstanding these defects photographs and etched copies may, however, be accepted for what they are worth, and used, not as substitutes for the originals, which should be studied in preference whenever the opportunity occurs, but as reminders and records. Flameng's copies are marvellous for their spirit and truth, and may be recommended as interpretations of the mind of Rembrandt.†

It is not necessary to repeat here what is known of Rembrandt's life ; the reader will find details in M. Blanc's biography which will interest him, but our knowledge of Rembrandt's existence is not very complete. It is certain that he was passionately fond of art, and an eager collector, being willing to buy art as well as to sell it. He had a keen knowledge of human nature, and knew how to catch connoisseurs by the bait of rarity, making different states

\* Etchings are now reproduced by the "Heliogravure Amand-Durand," with a wonderful yet not quite absolutely perfect fidelity. The plate in his process is really etched, whilst photography ensures its accuracy in the direction of the lines.

† Here is the title of M. Blanc's Catalogue of Rembrandt's works with Flameng's illustrations :—

"L'Œuvre complet de Rembrandt, décrit et commenté par M. Charles Blanc, ancien Directeur des Beaux-Arts. Catalogue raisonné de toutes les Eaux-fortes du Maître et de ses Peintures, orné de Bois gravés et de quarante Eaux-fortes tirées à part et rapportées dans le texte. 2 vols. Paris : L. Guérin, éditeur. Dépôt et vente à la librairie Théodore Morgand, 5, rue Bonaparte "



of plates on purpose to gratify them in this respect. It appears to be positively known that he had a printing-press in his own studio, and took proofs with his own hands, as every true etcher ought to do.

The value of his etchings has increased greatly since his death, and never more than during the last few years. A single copy of his whole work could not be brought together for less than twelve or fourteen thousand pounds—even supposing the possibility of making a complete collection.

The plate of “Christ healing the Sick” was called the Hundred Guilder Print, because Rembrandt sold a copy of it for that sum. At M. de Burgy’s sale, in Amsterdam, in 1755, an impression, in the first state, before the diagonal lines on the neck of the ass, sold for 84 guilders (£7). This afterwards became the property of Mr. Barnard, at whose sale (London, 1798) it was bought by Mr. G. Hibbert for £33 : 1 : 6. Mr. Hibbert’s collection was sold in 1809, and Mr. Esdaile bought this impression for £41 : 7 : 6. When Mr. Esdaile’s collection, in its turn, came to the hammer, this impression fetched £231, Mr. Holford being the purchaser. Another impression was bought by Mr. Smith, at Baron Verstolk’s sale, in Amsterdam, 1847, for less than £140, and sold, not long ago, at Mr. Charles Price’s sale, to Mr. Palmer, for £1180. An impression in the usual state was sold at Mr. Carew’s sale, in 1835, for £16 : 10s.; at M. Debois’s sale, in Paris, 1844, for £112; and at that of Mr. Johnson (London, 1860) for £160.

One of the best instances, of the money-value which attaches to mere curiosity, quite independently of art, is Rembrandt’s “Sleeping Dog.” He originally etched this in one corner of a plate measuring about four inches and a quarter wide by two and a half high, and afterwards cut it down to three and a quarter wide by one and a half high. Only one impression, in the first state, is known, which sold at Mr. Hibbert’s sale, in 1809, for £1 : 10s. The Duke of



Buckingham subsequently obtained it for £6; and at his sale, in 1834, it brought £61. In 1841 the British Museum gave £120 for it. The difference between this copy and an ordinary one is exactly six square inches of white paper, so that the British Museum actually gave a little under twenty pounds per square inch for some blank paper which Rembrandt considered *injurious* to his etching, since he diminished the size of the copper. The essential point, as a matter of curiosity, was that this white paper should be *within the plate-mark*. This may be taken as a typical example of that purchasing for curiosity which is so distinct from the love of art. If the size of the copper had been beneficial to the etching, Rembrandt would not have reduced it. Artistically, therefore, in Rembrandt's opinion, the needlessly large copper was a defect, and the first state not the best. But, in questions of price, curiosity always influences more than art, and an artistic defect will be extravagantly paid for, if only it is a proof of rarity; especially if, as in this instance, it is connected with some odd circumstance, of a character sufficiently trivial to awaken the interest of persons whose love of art is languid.

#### SACRED SUBJECTS.

*Hagar dismissed by Abraham* (Blanc, 3; Bartsch, 30; Claussin, 37; Wilson, 37).—The references to the regular catalogues will save the space that would be occupied by descriptions, and allow us to devote the whole of these pages to pure criticism.

This is one of the most perfectly delicate of all Rembrandt's etchings. The sureness of the faint thin lines on which the expression of the faces chiefly depends, the masterly reservation of reflections and half-lights in open shading, the opportune omission of labour where omission was better than toil, justify our admiration. Observe the





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upright one ; it is further distinguished by the French critics as the one *en manière noire*, by which they mean that the plate has been heavily inked. The brilliancy of the sacerdotal vestments is rendered here with a power so extraordinary, that the plate is a great technical feat. The lines are coarse and rude, but so entirely synthetic and intelligent in their arrangement, that the splendour of gold, and jewels, and embroidery, is fully suggested to the imagination. The high priest, who is standing, is one of the most imposing figures amongst all the creations of Rembrandt, who had a keen appreciation of sacerdotal dignity and magnificence.

*Repose in Egypt* (Blanc, 31 ; Bartsch, 58 ; Claussin, 62 ; Wilson, 63).—This plate is so very slightly bitten as to be exceedingly pale, but M. Charles Blanc believes that this feebleness was intentional. Great artists, in their designs, have often drawn whole pages of such extreme delicacy and paleness that their work is half invisible, and its finest passages to be apprehended by the imagination alone. It is a kind of artistic caprice, like the faint playing of a musician when he imitates music in the remote distance. A plate in this condition is in a very good state to be carried forward in pure dry-point.

*Jesus Christ preaching* (Blanc, 39 ; Bartsch, 67 ; Claussin, 71 ; Wilson, 71).—One of the finest of Rembrandt's sacred subjects, and, in its original state, one of the most simple in execution. The copper belonged to Norblin, the engraver, who laboriously retouched it. At Norblin's death it was sold to Mr. Colnaghi. As an example of genuine etcher's work an early impression is unexceptionable.

*The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Blanc, 43 ; Bartsch, 91 ; Claussin, 95, Wilson, 96).—Here again is one of the existing coppers, remarkable chiefly for the frightful hideousness of the principal figures. Rembrandt may have desired to indicate that the unfortunate youth had become swinish



from companionship with swine, but surely there could be no especial reason for the ugliness of his father. There is, however, much dramatic truth, and even some tenderness, in the arrangement of the group.

*Christ healing the Sick* (Blanc, 49 ; Bartsch, 74 ; Claussin, 78 ; Wilson, 78).—This is the famous etching known as ‘The Hundred Guilder Print,’ and of which a single impression has been sold for the enormous sum of £1180. There are several other plates by Rembrandt at least equal to this in artistic quality, but from its large dimensions and the delicacy of its finish, as well as the impressiveness of the subject, and the force with which the scene is realised, “The Hundred-Guilder Print” is usually considered the most important work of the master; and the unprecedented sum which has been lately given for it will only tend to confirm the supremacy of its position. No etching was ever better finished, as true etchers understand finish. The labour is by no means equal throughout, but is skilfully expended where most required, and economised where it could only have interfered with the concentration of the thought. The realism that pervades all that Rembrandt ever did, does not even here give place to any vain attempt at style, and yet the work has style of its own kind, though not in the narrow classical sense. The subject is one with which we have been rendered too familiar, by many artists, for it to exercise its full power on the imagination; and it requires great effort in the modern mind, detached as it is from the idea of the miraculous, to realise the actual presence of a teacher who could enforce his doctrine by relieving his hearers from their heaviest personal calamities. We must try, however, to sympathise with their eager hope and grateful rejoicing, if we would understand the expression on all these expectant faces.

There is a good deal of dry-point work, and towards the left Rembrandt took care to remove the bur, which



destroyed the balance of the chiaroscuro. The market value of an impression in the first state, before Rembrandt had improved and completed the plate, is, of course, much greater than that of a perfect copy, Rembrandt's opinion being held of slight importance by connoisseurship, in comparison with the merit of rarity and the evidence of an early impression. There is a curious logical fallacy involved in the anxiety for *evidence* that an impression is an early one. Why are early impressions valued especially at all? Because they are supposed to be of better quality than later ones. But if quality is the object, what is the necessity for evidence? Is not quality its own evidence? Connoisseurship first seeks early impressions for their quality, and then distrusts its own judgment as to the very thing it seeks, and so is obliged to look for marks by which an early impression may be known. For instance, in the case of this very etching, connoisseurs tell the first state by the absence of certain diagonal lines on the neck of the ass.

*Descent from the Cross by Torchlight* (Blanc, 58; Bartsch, 83; Claussin, 87; Wilson, 88).—Although the great “Descent from the Cross” is much more generally known, and may be considered, in a certain sense, more sublime, I have an especial liking for this; the work is so right and manly, and the composition so natural and yet so full of art. The way in which the sheet is thrown upon the bier, and the masculine indications of its folds, are a lesson for our modern etchers. If the value of such work as this had been rightly understood by the modern English and Germans, they would have avoided half their errors.

*The three Crosses* (Blanc, 53; Bartsch, 78; Claussin, 81; Wilson, 81).—In the short chapters of the First Book, I spoke of frankness and passion as necessary elements in great etching, and of speed as a quality in itself desirable, when not obtained at the cost of necessary modulations in line. This etching of “The Three Crosses” is, of all Rem-





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fully equal this ; yet not one of them absorbs me so completely. The solemnity of fast approaching death, the gravity of the stately high-priest and the calm physician ; the sorrow of others present, the pale face upon the pillow, and the helpless hands upon the counterpane,—are elements of a scene which renews itself too frequently ever to lose its interest. In the upper air of the lofty room, angels wait for the spirit which the nations will adore as the Queen of Heaven ; and the scene has a grandeur more than royal, for it has the sublimity of art. Considered as etching, the work is so sound and right, so various in degrees of finish, and so masterly in choice and direction of line, that “The Death of the Virgin” may be taken as one of the great typical examples of what etching may be, and ought to be. If the reader would give half-an-hour to a fine impression of this plate, he would understand for ever after the painful and almost indignant feelings with which we hear men depreciate etching in the vanity of their superciliousness.

#### ALLEGORIES AND FANCIES.

*Youth surprised by Death* (Blanc, 79 ; Bartsch, 109 ; Claussin, 111 ; Wilson, 113).—The figure of the young man in this exquisite etching is by far the most elegant of all Rembrandt’s creations ; indeed, perhaps, the only one which has, in any marked degree, the character of elegance at all. There is a singular delicacy in the whole of the plate, very notably in the hair and head-dress of the women. It has been beautifully copied by Flameng.

*A Lion Hunt* (Blanc, 87 ; Bartsch, 115 ; Claussin, 117 ; Wilson, 119).—A rapid and hasty sketch full of fire and spirit, and curiously resembling in its peculiar inspiration, the ideas of Eugène Delacroix.

*The Bathers* (Blanc, 117 ; Bartsch, 195 ; Claussin, 192 ; Wilson, 192).—Of course, no artist is to be judged by his



worst productions ; but Rembrandt is so great that he can well afford to be frankly criticised. He seems to have been absolutely indifferent to the beauty of the naked figure, but he never went lower than this in the recording of its hideousness and degradation. We might compare these men to gorillas or baboons, but they are more repulsive ; because the ideal of the baboon does not involve the beautiful, whereas the ideal of man reaches to the Apollo Belvedere. What sort of satisfaction Rembrandt could find in the sketching of these pitiable objects, is a mystery. They have not even life enough to enjoy their bath like men, but are as miserable and shivering as they are shapeless.

#### THE BEGGARS.

Rembrandt etched about twenty-five subjects of beggars, several of which are exceedingly felicitous and curiously picturesque. As the plates of some of these subjects still exist, they are sold at low prices ; but, although the lines of one or two that I have examined are certainly Rembrandt's own lines, they have been apparently rebitten to make them last longer. Of course, when a plate has been rebitten by other hands than those of the etcher himself, it can no longer be considered a strictly original work. The direction of the lines is what the artist intends it to be, but not their depth.

The reader will find several fine copies of Rembrandt's "Beggars" in M. Blanc's Catalogue. One of the finest, in some respects, is No. 145, "Mendiants, Homme et Femme." Only two impressions of it are known to exist ; one in the Cabinet at Paris, the other in the Museum of Amsterdam. The plate was a failure, and Rembrandt probably destroyed it ; but though the face of the nearer figure is a blot, and though the execution generally bears the same relation to common drawing that the almost illegible manuscript of an excited author bears to the rounded pothooks of a schoolboy,



still it is very grand work. Another very fine beggar is No. 149, "Gueux à gros Ventre." Observe the masterly economy of labour in the cloak and boots ; the boots especially are splendid examples of fine swift treatment of costume.

#### ACADEMICAL SUBJECTS.

There are about a dozen etchings of the naked figure by Rembrandt. Some of these are very common, as the plates belong to M. Bernard, of Paris, who still prints editions of them. The naked man seated on the ground (Blanc, 160 ; Ba. 196 ; Cl. 193 ; W. 193) is a very good piece of evidence as to Rembrandt's matter-of-fact interpretation. It is simple realism, quite devoid of aspiration. The model was a poor one, with no form, and Rembrandt seems to have felt no impatience, but to have copied the bad shapes quite contentedly. He accepted ugliness without repugnance. The naked woman whose feet are in water (Blanc, 164) is an instance of bad form of another kind. The young man had no form because he was meagre ; this woman has none because she is fat : both etchings are as repulsive as photographs of ill-chosen models. And yet these two reasons are not the ultimate statement of the matter, for there is a lean ideal and a fat ideal ; there is a leanness which has a spiritual beauty, and a fulness which has a sensual and material beauty ; the early Italian painters knew the first, and Rubens knew the second, but Rembrandt knew neither. Yet he *had* an ideal, but we need not look for it in his studies of the naked figure, lean or fat ; his ideal was not corporeal, but mental, and is to be found in his best portraits, and in many personages in his religious subjects, who are as personal and individual as portraits.

The "Diana at the Bath" (Bl. 165 ; Ba. 201 ; C. 198 ; W. 198) is little better, in point of form, than the woman with her feet in the water, but the figure is well poised, and





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PLATE I.

(To be placed opposite page 90.)

THE CORPULENT BEGGAR (Gueux à Gros Ventre)  
After Rembrandt.

*Copied by the Author.*

BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
Light scratches in background . . . . .	7
Darker lines on edge . . . . .	12
Finer lines on cloak, face, top of cap, and shadow in background .	32
Darkest lines of cloak, boots, and shadow of boots . . . . .	50
First proof taken, it having been thought unadvisable to carry the biting to its extreme limit for fear of over-biting. The darkest lines were therefore still somewhat weak, and needed rebiting. Plate covered for rebiting, but all lines protected except the darkest.	
Darkest lines bitten 20 minutes more, making their total . . . . .	70
In the printing, this plate is well wiped with the canvas only, which leaves a slight tint of oil. It has then been lightly <i>retroussée</i> on all the darkest lines. The face is not <i>retroussée</i> , nor are the thin scratchings.	







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most admirably drawn, technically. This is by far the finest of all Rembrandt's naked figures, much finer than the Antiope, for instance, though the pose of the Antiope is good, if the forms are not.

### PORTRAITS.

It appears to be very difficult to etch a good portrait, if we are to judge by the rarity of successful attempts. There are scarcely any modern etched portraits worth mentioning, and very few older ones, except those of Rembrandt and Vandyke. Rembrandt owed something of his success in portraits to constant practice on the best of all models—himself. He etched his own portrait more than thirty times over, in various dresses—an amount of egotism for which any modern etcher would incur the most severe reprobation of reviewers. He had a picturesque physiognomy, and was as good a subject as any he was likely to find ; nor have we the right to blame an egotism which, in his case, was purely artistic, and very far removed from any vulgar sentiment of vanity. Rembrandt knew that he was a good subject, and found that in this instance the model readily complied with the requirements of the artist ; so he often sat for hours before his looking-glass, and etched the keen, plain visage he saw in it. He etched his old mother seven or eight times, and his wife half as often : the old woman had a capital face, and her illustrious son, then young and obscure, drew it with the utmost intelligence and affection. His early portrait of her (Bl. 193 ; Ba. 354 ; C. 343 ; W. 348) is one of the most perfect of all his works. He was twenty-two years old then, and already a great master-etcher. One might expatiate long on the firm and exquisite truth with which the wrinkled face has been studied, and yet the wrinkles are not mapped out in a servile Denner-like manner, but always largely interpreted with reference to expression and anatomy. See how they are accentuated on the temple as it passes into the



shade ; how the reflected lights are kept clear under the chin, where they have scarcely a perceptible breadth ; how the few thin hairs are drawn with their wave of curl ; how the half extinguished eye retains its remnant of calm light ; how the placid lips, full of experience and quiet capacity of irony, meet in their sage reserve ! There is another very fine portrait of the same old lady (Bl. 196 ; Ba. 345 ; C. 333 ; W. 339), an extraordinary *tour de force* in the rendering of an old woman's face, and technically remarkable for its translation of various local values of black in the veil and dress. Of Rembrandt's portraits of himself, two may be especially mentioned,—the "Rembrandt with the Sabre and Aigrette" (Bl. 232 ; Ba. 23 ; C. 23 ; W. 23), and "Rembrandt appuyé" (Bl. 234 ; Ba. 21 ; C. 21 ; W. 21). The first of these two portraits gives us Rembrandt in his character of a lover of strange and picturesque costumes, of which he had a considerable collection ; the other represents him, very probably, in the dress he usually wore, and is that from which most of us derive our idea of his person. He lived in an age when a man might dress picturesquely without being hooted or laughed at, and so indulged his artistic instincts very freely. No more picturesque scene can be imagined than the interior of Rembrandt's house, full of all things that his eyes desired : of arms, and carving, and porcelain, of rare tissues, of statues and busts, of pictures, of quaint furniture, of tapestries, and animals and plants, of spoils of earth and sea. In the midst of all these things sat that illustrious and immortal genius—sat, as we see him in this portrait, himself not less picturesque than the things around him, a masculine and robust man, knowing the aspects of life, and scrutinising all things with those sharp, penetrating eyes. What interested him most in the living world around him was neither the loveliness of women, nor the grace of infancy, but the thoughtful faces of mature and intelligent men. Thus he drew Cornelius Ansloo, a celebrated preacher of those





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PLATE II.

(To be placed opposite page 92.)

PORTRAIT OF OLD MOTHER, by Rembrandt.

*Copied by the Author.*

BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
Palest lines at roots of hair, on forehead, behind head, at lower right-hand corner, etc. . . . .	5
Darker touches on wrinkles, thin dark lines elsewhere, hair, etc. .	15
Other dark but thin lines . . . . .	30
Darkest lines . . . . .	45
<p>First proof taken.</p> <p>Plate covered again with black ground, and a number of lines and touches which had been omitted now drawn in their places, and bitten in the same proportion as above.</p> <p>Second proof taken. Some lines and touches reduced with the scraper, others deepened with the burin.</p>	
<p>In printing, this plate is wiped with canvas only, and not <i>retroussée</i>.</p>	







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days ; Asselyn, a painter of reputation ; Ephraim Bonus, a physician ; Clement de Jonghe, a famous publisher of prints ; Janus Lutma, a well-known goldsmith ; the Burgomaster Six, and other personages, in almost every instance remarkable for an appearance of strong understanding or venerable dignity which compels us to remember and respect them. It may have been a subtle flattery on the part of Rembrandt to give to his sitters a wise and meditative look, as other portraitists add beauty to the features, and dissimulate physical defects ; but there was a sturdy frankness in Rembrandt's nature which inclines us rather to the belief that he would not have condescended even to this delicate species of flattery, and that there existed in his models, at least, a strong suggestion of the qualities he attributed to them. The one rare merit of these portraits is that they never seem to lay traps for our admiration, and have no anxiety to please. The Burgomaster Six is reading quietly at his window, without a thought of the world beyond ; Ephraim Bonus is thinking not of us, but of the patient whom he has just left upstairs ; Uytenbogaert, the gold-weigher, is entirely absorbed in his accounts. The difference between these portraits and too many modern ones is, that these have dignity without pretension, whereas the others have pretension without dignity. The execution is sometimes exceedingly marvellous, as, for instance, the modelling of the gold-weigher's face, the moustache and imperial of old Haaring, and the eyebrow of Janus Lutma. Whenever the hands are given, as in the lesser Coppenol, the Ansloo, and the Lutma, they are drawn in a simple and direct way, but with singular attention to the character and constitution of the man. Whilst on the subject of execution, we cannot omit to mention the remarkable silvery beard worn by a nameless old man with a fur cap. It is nearly all done by suggestion and omission, but the fulness and softness of it are perfectly expressed. There is an art very useful to etchers, by which



the imagination of the spectator is made to do half the work ; Rembrandt understood this, and often had recourse to it with much cunning. By telling you what the hairs are like on the left side of the beard, he makes you believe that you see hairs on the right, though in reality he gives you nothing there but a space of blank paper.

#### LANDSCAPES.

Though Rembrandt's draughtsmanship in the figure was often incorrect as to proportion, it was always scientific and based upon anatomical studies, which we know to have been amongst the artist's valued and beloved pursuits. But he did not draw animals so well as men, nor trees so well as animals, and was, in short, much less scientific as a landscape-painter than as a master of the figure. We all know how the study of landscape has lingered behind the study of the human body ; but, because many of the old masters brought to the execution of landscape-subjects that grand and governing *manner* which they had learned in another branch of art, and because they could, at least, express their sentiment, which was often noble and just, it has resulted that their reputation is considerable, notwithstanding the limitations of their knowledge, and that, even in these days of more accurate research and keener interest in the facts of the external world, these old masters still hold their ground against the rivalry of the most cultivated moderns. Thus Rembrandt's manner in landscape is better than that of any modern, except Turner and Haden ; and our skilful English landscape-painters, notwithstanding their far greater knowledge of the various effects of nature, have a littleness of expression with the etching-needle which places them in a lower rank as artists. This is the distinction which connoisseurs universally feel, and which makes them often unjust towards the moderns, and blind to their especial superiorities. I have not space





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Great Tree" (Bl. 326), are, perhaps, the finest examples of Rembrandt's masterly use of the needle in pure etching. The distances in both plates are remarkable for ease and simplicity of manner.

It is always, however, a mistake to attribute too much importance to manual skill in etching, or in any other of the great arts. When there is the true understanding of nature, and the true artistic sentiment, manual skill usually comes with practice, and the greatest artists never trouble themselves about it, warning their pupils against anxiety on that score. The distinction between the possession of manual skill and artistic genius is perfectly illustrated in the case of Flameng, the engraver who etched the wonderful copies from Rembrandt in M. Blanc's Catalogue. I have no hesitation in saying that, in manual skill, Flameng is equal to Rembrandt,\* or to any etcher who ever lived ; and yet, in the first edition of this work, I did not think it necessary to mention Flameng amongst modern etchers, whilst I gave an entire chapter to Daubigny, who is clumsiness itself (or was, at that time) in comparison with him. If Rembrandt had no higher claim on our consideration than mechanical ability with the point, he would not deserve mention in the records of an art whose glory is to spring directly from the mind.

\* This assertion, bold as it may seem, was fully confirmed later by the publication of Flameng's copy, in facsimile, of the famous Hundred-Guilder print, a copy which in all technical qualities is simply equal to the original. Flameng has his due place in this edition amongst the etchers who interpret the works of painters.



## CHAPTER III.

### *OSTADE AND BEGA.*

THE repugnance which a refined modern gentleman, full of scholarly ideas and delicate sympathies, feels for the sort of humanity in which Ostade delighted, is strong enough in many instances to counterbalance all the technical qualities of the artist, and permanently repel the student. Ostade is not the only painter who has studied the habits of the peasantry : we have just seen that Rembrandt had a predilection for beggars, and the cottages of poor French farmers and labourers have, during the last few years, been the favourite studies of a class of painters by no means wanting in refinement, whose representative is Édouard Frère. Poverty is not a disqualification in the living subjects of a picture, and it is probable that the most refined artists, if obliged to choose between the interior of a rich tradesman's dining-room, or the interior of a Highland bothy, or a *chaumière* in the Morvan, would prefer the rough floor, and rude furniture, and simple inhabitants, to the carpets and mahogany, with their living accompaniments in broadcloth and fine silk. The poor do not repel us in Faed, or Frère, or Duverger, but they are very repulsive in Ostade and Bega,—so repulsive that we only endure them for the sake of the accomplished art.

In justice to ourselves, let us say that it is not the poverty which repels us, but the insensitiveness of the painter to all that is best amongst the poor : his incapacity to recognise the true refinement of the rare and delicate natures which are dis-



guised in mean apparel, his blindness to that beauty of character and countenance which is not aided by the arts of luxury. It is not to be believed that when Ostade and Bega studied the Dutch peasantry, the whole of the poor population of Holland was lost in bestiality, or that all the nobler feelings of human nature were utterly crushed out of it by the weight of care, like the juice from trodden grapes. And yet *their* peasants are universally mere animals, incapable of tenderness and thought, capable only of instinctive cares and besotted sensuality. The males pursue the females, the females give suck to their young, and the height of satisfaction is a swinish contentment in the fulness of the belly and the apathy of the brain.

But, though on the human side there is nothing in this class of art to delight a modern public, it has often technical merits of a rare order. Ostade, especially, was a composer of remarkable ability, combining in the most felicitous way the two compositions of form and chiaroscuro. He was very inferior to Rembrandt in the variety of his execution. Rembrandt had many resources of method which were inaccessible to Ostade; but Ostade had always craft sufficient for his purpose, and could reach with great certainty the effects of light, the transparencies, the accentuations which gave him pleasure. It would be an interesting subject for speculation how an artistic accomplishment, which in its way certainly proves much visual and manual cultivation, was compatible with such deadness of the heart and such apathy of the intellect. Cases of this kind seem to prove that technical skill in the fine arts is possible without mental elevation, but they do not demonstrate the vanity of artistic culture generally. It was something for Ostade that he could at least see when his peasants composed well, and that he could enjoy the lights and shadows which gave a sort of sublimity to their habitations. An accomplishment may be worth having, without working the miracle of giving nobility to a





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at the feet of mountains, For example, in this etching the composition rises always towards the right, and is buttressed by slopes to the left. See how amply the figure of the man is supported by the boy and the dog, and by the seated woman. This law of diminution to the left is carried out in the most trifling accessories, in the basins above the door, in the spaces between the three cross-pieces nailed to the beams, in the two boards near the ladder, in the openings of the bed and the door. If the woman had advanced her left foot instead of her right, the man behind her would not have been so well supported ; and if the little dog had been absent, the buttressing on that side would not have been continued to the ground. The lighting is, of course, intended to give importance to the group ; there are admirable reflections and transparencies in the shade.

Of Ostade's small plates, the reader is recommended to study (for their directness of manner) the bust of an old peasant with a pointed cap, and the smoker in an oval. The "Hurdy-gurdy Player" (dated 1647) is a curious instance of careful rendering of the folds of dress.

Some of Ostade's original coppers exist in Paris, but they are so worn that impressions are now worthless.

BECA. *Le Cabaret* (Bartsch, v. 240, 35).—A group of peasants in an ale-house, with a very dark shading behind the figures ; a brilliant and effective plate, but coarse in conception, and wanting in the artistic subtleties that distinguish the masterpiece of Ostade.

Bega's common fault of too much blackness in shadows is equally visible in a clever little figure with a short cloak, "L'Homme avec la Main dans le Pourpoint" (Bartsch, v. 228, 10). The most delicate bit of work by Bega is the woman in the lozenge, "La Femme portant la Cruche" (Bartsch, v. 228, 9). The dress is very cleverly accentuated



PLATE III.

PEASANTS DRINKING, BY OSTADE,

A portion of a larger Plate representing a Village Feast.

*Copied by the Author.*



## PLATE III.

(To be placed opposite page 100.)

PEASANTS DRINKING, by Ostade, a portion of a larger  
Plate representing a Village Feast.

*Copied by the Author*

### BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit	Minutes
Light shade on flag . . . . .	5
Lightest parts of tree . . . . .	10
Distant tree . . . . .	25
Other tree, cottages, and distant figures . . . . .	35
Foreground figures . . . . .	50
Foreground . . . . .	70

First proof taken.

Plate covered again with black ground, and many lines drawn which had been overlooked in the first drawing. These were bitten like their neighbours as above. A light shade was also added here and there over lines already bitten, and this was bitten from five to ten minutes.

The plate was finished with a little light dry-point work here and there, and a few touches with the burin.

Plate wiped with the hand in printing. The immediate foreground  
*retouched.*





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pictures. He had clear sight, a firm hand, a most excellent memory ; but no imagination, and very little power of composition. No painter who ever lived retained a more vivid image of an animal after having seen it, nor could any painter copy that image better. But his art was never much more than a very brilliant copyism of facts, though since these facts were usually of a nature which the memory alone could enable him to record, his art is on that account more wonderful than the patient literalism which copies a helmet or a vase. Paul Potter had points of superiority over Berghem in his entire freedom from false elegance ; he was quite unaffected, exceedingly clear and accurate in handling, yet not vain of his precision, nor at all anxious to display it. He etched with spirit, but was deficient in freedom, and did not sketch, nor see things with the comprehensiveness of a great sketcher like Rembrandt. I admire his power of memory, his vivacity and spirit, his genuine love of animals, his knowledge of animal construction, his certainty of hand ; but consider that his weakness in comprehensive sketching and want of imagination disqualify him for a place in the first rank.

Karl Dujardin is one of those artists who, whilst enjoying a great reputation amongst the class of connoisseurs who never work from nature, retain slighter hold on our admiration when our judgment has been fortified by much practical study. He learned his horse by heart, and his cow, and his sheep, and his pig, and his donkey, and his goat ; and being able to draw them in a regular manner, and in any common attitude, set them in fancy landscapes of the kind which connoisseurs receive as a sufficient representation of nature. There is much truth in the attitudes of Dujardin's animals, and the power of drawing them as he did is by no means to be attained easily, for it requires great labour and a certain natural gift ; yet such animal design as his cannot be accepted as of first-rate excellence, because it is too methodical, and wanting in artistic synthesis. He is inferior in



skill and knowledge to Paul Potter, but nearly of the same rank in point of artistic conception and imagination, and quite free from the misplaced elegance which often spoiled the work of Berghem. He was not a good etcher, because he could not sketch well ; but his name could not be omitted in a work on etching, on account of his considerable reputation. His stiff, precise lines are not to be recommended for imitation, and his ignorance of landscape was complete. His merits are a certain knowledge of animals, expressed with perfect sincerity, and a dexterity sufficient for his purpose. His lighting is often luminous, but his chiaroscuro was feeble because he had not the least idea of the value of local colour when translated into black and white ; and in most of his etchings local colour is altogether omitted.

A curious instance of purchasing for curiosity occurred in the case of some animals by Berghem. He etched two sets of six each, and one of these sets was executed on a single copper, afterwards divided. Only one impression taken before the division is now known, and the British Museum paid £120 for it. The present value of that proof is about £400, and its only superiority over good impressions of the six separate plates is a matter of pure curiosity, depending upon the not very interesting or important fact, that there is only one large plate-mark instead of six smaller ones.

BERGHEM. *The Rivulet by the ruined Monument.*—Without elaborate description, the reader may recognise this plate by the woman who is seated in the foreground, with her left foot in the water whilst she wipes the right. There are other figures, and cows, and goats, and sheep. There are traces of sculpture on the monument, especially the bas-relief of a horse. This is one of Berghem's most brilliant and characteristic etchings. The brilliancy is obtained, in a great measure, by vigorous little bits of dark inserted in places where the artist had a fair pretext for their introduction.



Plates of this class are usually kept very light, but the etchers were always on the look-out for such little spots of intense black as that under the woman's armpit here: when these were vigorously marked, a certain liveliness was the result. The student will observe the neat sharp draughtsmanship in the cattle, and the rather dandified elegance of the cowherd with the pole, and the woman who is washing her feet.

*The Piper* (Bartsch, v. 257, 4).—A man on an ass meets a pedestrian with a bagpipe, and talks to him, showing him the way with his hand. Behind the piper is a man driving sheep and cows. To the right are many trees, and in the distance a softly-wooded hill. The group in the middle has a picturesque outline, and is exceedingly rich in shade. The work in this central group is generally of fine quality, but there is a somewhat morbid softness, not altogether masculine, in the distant foliage.

*The Shepherd by the Fountain* (Bartsch, v. 259, 8).—Of all Berghem's plates this is the most characteristic of the master. The figures pose like models who have learned their business well, but not very like the peasants of actual life. The animals are all remarkable for an extraordinary clearness and neatness of execution. Observe especially the head and leg of the cow in the foreground. The shadows are kept exceedingly transparent, and the reflections light; the bucket is an epitome of Berghem's practice in these respects.

*The Goat's Head with the black Forehead* (Bartsch, v. 267, 19).—A piece of very exquisite execution of its kind, especially in the horns and the dark hair on the goat's forehead. There is also a small plate with two goats' heads executed with equal skill. Work of this kind approaches more nearly to modern ideas of etching than that of the old masters can be generally said to do. It is not unlike Gauermann in manner, and the best work of the English Club is of the same class.





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KARL DUJARDIN. *Cow, Sheep, and Herdsman, with a city in the distance.*—The best thing here is the head of the cow, which may be taken as a perfect example of Dujardin's most successful work. So, on the other hand, is he not unfairly represented by the childish weakness of the distant landscape. There is not the least merit of any kind in the trees and hill, and the buildings all lean to the left, in defiance of gravitation. There is no local colour ; and tree, and hide, and grass, are all left white in the light.

*A Ruin near a stream, Artist sketching.*—Since there are no cattle here, but only a landscape and buildings, we can expect nothing but feebleness. This is modest and unpretending work, based upon the notions of landscape prevalent in the seventeenth century ; but it is surprising how it was possible for a man who had really studied the construction of animals, not to have clearer insight into that of inanimate nature. Such work as this is as inferior to the etching of Haden or Lalanne, as the water-colours of a modern school-girl to the work of Richardson. It sometimes happens that an artist will compensate for his sins against natural truth by the mere power of his workmanship ; but here, as in all Dujardin's landscapes, the etching is as technically weak as the interpretation of nature is unintelligent and inadequate.



## CHAPTER V.

### *VANDYKE AND HOLLAR.*

**I**N the course of the last few pages there has not been very much eulogy of the unqualified and enthusiastic kind. Good etchers are exceedingly rare, having hitherto been produced in Europe at the rate of about two in a century. It is possible that, notwithstanding the divergence of opinion on the subject of the rank and capabilities of the art, which unhappily subsists between the present writer and the large majority of the general public, there may, nevertheless, be more harmony between us than we supposed. The public is indifferent to all etchings whatever ; the critic is indifferent to all but a very few etchings.

No true critic can be indifferent to Vandyke. He is one of the great princes of the art, a royal master who is to be spoken of only with the most profound respect. He had all the great qualities ; he had perfect freedom and exquisite refinement ; he used the needle with admirable ease and grace, and his masterly force was restrained and tempered with a cultivated severity. But it is inevitable that a genius of this kind, whose purposes were few, and who always kept steadily to the path where success ever attended him, should not offer matter for so much commentary as the less admirable and less wise, but more various and audacious artists who have undertaken many different enterprises, and alternately surprised the world by unexpected triumphs and almost unaccountable failures. A writer, cunning in his craft, who found himself obliged to supply many pages about



Vandyke, would have recourse to speculations about the personages he painted, and the history and characteristics of their age ; so that the artist himself would become nothing more than the pretext for a dissertation on manners and events. But of Vandyke himself, as an etcher, little more is to be said than the few sentences already written. His aims were few, his choice of means instinctively wise and right, his command of them absolute, his success complete.

Hollar was not a painter, but a most industrious engraver, and it has rarely happened hitherto that a professional engraver has produced original etchings of great artistic value. The training of an engraver is injurious to originality, and restrictive of freedom, it has also the drawback of being almost exclusively manual and interpretative ; and there is always a great danger that the engraver who attempts artistic etching will fall into the set methods which have become habitual to him, and think less of the great artistic exigencies than of that manual neatness and polish which, as an aim in itself, great artists have ever disdained. There have, however, been one or two exceptions to this rule ; and though it is generally true that, to become a great etcher, it is necessary to be first a great painter, it is also the fact that one or two engravers, by profession, have etched occasionally in the high artistic sense. The great majority of Hollar's etchings are not to be recommended as examples of this particular art, but one or two of them have a rare and delicate beauty, which gives him a certain rank.

The proofs of Vandyke's etchings have greatly increased in value of late years. At M. Séguier's sale, in 1844, they averaged from three to eight pounds each, and were then thought to be very dear. At recent sales they have produced sums varying from eight to thirty pounds. Mr. Marshall's set, which a few years ago might have brought eighty or ninety pounds, was knocked down at his sale (1864) for £400. It may be considered certain that, as etching becomes better





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HOLLAR. *Gentleman playing on a Guitar.*—The Hollar collection, at the British Museum, is so very extensive, that it may be well to inform the reader that this is the last plate in the sixth volume there. The guitar-player is seated near an open window, through which are visible a tower and some shipping. The guitar is of curious construction, being double-scrolled. The player has long hair, a beardless youthful face, and very beautiful, somewhat feminine hands. This etching is remarkable for a quite extraordinary delicacy of treatment, and a most exquisite taste. It is not so vigorous as the work of Vandyke, but fully equal to him in elegance. The methodical habits of the engraver recur most in the window-opening, and are especially observable in the mechanical treatment of the sky. There is a great deal of lovely curvature in the guitar and the player's hands, and it is probable that Hollar may have felt the utility of the stiff window lines as a contrast. The tonality of the whole plate is quite perfect in its own key.

*The Long View of Greenwich.*—Recommended for study, only on account of the distance and the observatory. The foreground, which is covered with dull engraver's work, is curiously barren and uninteresting, and even the sky is mechanical.



## CHAPTER VI.

### *CANALETTI, RUYSDAEL, AND OTHERS*

**T**HERE is a certain clearness of manner, and simplicity of purpose, in Canaletti, as an etcher, which makes his work esteemed, not only by connoisseurs, who usually follow tradition in their estimate of works of art, but even by true critics and artists. It is possible that a reason for the reputation of his etchings may be that, although he lived sufficiently long ago to be accepted with the respect given by connoisseurs to old masters, he has much of that modern feeling for the picturesque which most of us secretly enjoy, and which, in this case, we may legitimately applaud. If Canaletti were a living contemporary, connoisseurship would be less satisfied of his merits ; for connoisseurship, like the Catholic Church, waits a hundred years before it canonises its saints.

Canaletti's work is clear, and simple, and honest ; but it has very little freedom, a moderate appreciation of beauty, no grace, and no imagination. He saw that Venice was picturesque, and in him the modern enjoyment of architecture, as a pictorial subject, found its first adequate expression ; but we have better architectural painters in these days ; and though good etchers are always very rare, we have one or two men who etch better than Canaletti. The word which best characterises him is respectable mediocrity, but it is mediocrity still, however respectable.

His subjects were usually well selected, and his effects pictorial, though of the most ordinary kind. His etchings



would have greatly benefited by a more thorough study of tonality ; in several of the most important there are obvious faults of relation, chiefly due to a timidity about the values of near shadow and of local colour. In slighter work than that of Canaletti there may be much frank *omission*, even of tonic relations ; but he laboured his plates all over, and when he failed in this respect it was not the bold transgression of consummate science, but the hesitating error of half-knowledge.

Ruysdael has an immense fame amongst connoisseurs, especially on the Continent ; but this is one of those cases in which the modern study of nature is sure to drive the student either into secret revolt or open rebellion. I say nothing here of his pictures, which are out of my present subject, and the reader may worship Ruysdael as a "god of painting," if that kind of devotion is necessary to his spiritual comfort ; but of Ruysdael, as an etcher, I say simply that he is down somewhere in the fifth or sixth rank. It is intelligible that when work like that of Ruysdael is held up as the work of a great master, the majority of the public, not having time to investigate the matter for themselves, conclude that the whole art of etching is imperfect.

Salvator had magnificent gifts of a certain kind, but was not a great etcher, because he did not insist upon the especial powers of the art. All that Salvator did in etching might be done equally well in engraving, and he really aimed at the artistic objects of the great Italian engravers. Some of his plates are admirable in their way, but they are all bad examples of etching. The finest of them, to my mind, is "The Abandonment of Œdipus," which is sufficiently studied below.

Dietrich was exceedingly clever, manually, and very various in manner, but he was remarkable only as an unusually apt imitator of other men's work. His talent, in this respect, was nearly equal to the wonderful gift of our





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them very happily with other materials, such as marine subjects, figures, and landscape. He had the great artistic quality of being able to reach the tonality he aimed at, in which he seems to have had a certainty equal to that of a painter, and many of his etchings are almost as complete, in this respect, as pictures. They are frequently luminous and agreeable in aspect; they are also much nearer to the feeling of modern students of the picturesque than the work of older masters usually is. The copy from Weirotter given herewith is a good instance of this, for the interest of the artist in the detail of the old cottage, and the way he follows its ins and outs, are very modern indeed. I find, on the whole, that Weirotter rises in one's estimation as time goes on, which is the best proof of substantial qualities in an artist. In the plate given here the cloud is too hard and rocky, but the sky is (at least in the original) very pure and equal in tone, and the buildings are treated very skilfully, every line being studied with the utmost care throughout the variety of its inflections.

**CANALETTI.** *La Torre di Malghera.*—A white tower to the right, and two low buildings to the left of it; mountains in the distance, and water in the foreground, with a boat under the building, and a gondola coming into the picture, on the left. There are clouds in the sky, which is etched with much labour. The water is entirely rippled.

Of all Canaletti's etchings this one is the most luminous and the most modern in its choice and interpretation of subject. The buildings are etched with much force and considerable freedom, but the sky is too mechanical.

*Le Procuratie e S. Ziminian.*—A large, open place in Venice. To the right is the corner of a lofty building with balcony shades, and to the left another building with arches. There are high Venetian masts in the open square. This etching is truer, as to general tonality, than any other by



**PLATE IV.**

**COTTAGE ON A SHORE,**

**Part of larger Plate by WEIROTTER**

*Copied by the Author.*



# PLATE IV.

**(To be placed opposite page 114.)**

**COTTAGE ON A SHORE, part of a larger Plate by  
Weirotter:**

*Copied by the Author.*

## BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
Extreme distance . . . . .	4
Sky . . . . .	8
Shaded cloud . . . . .	12
Promontory with figures . . . . .	25
Cottages and cote . . . . .	40
Foreground, water, and boats . . . . .	60

First proof taken.

The plate was now covered for rebiting, and all the darkest portions were rebitten from five to fifteen minutes more.

Second proof taken.

The plate was now covered with the black ground, and light shades added wherever wanted. These were bitten from eight to sixteen minutes.

Third proof taken.

The plate was finished by reducing some of the palest lines in sky, cloud, and distance, and by adding a very few with the dry-point.

It is printed very simply indeed, being cleanly wiped and not *retroussée*.





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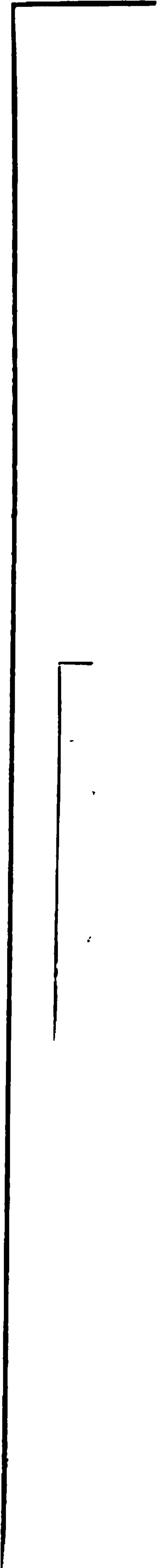
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is tying Œdipus by the feet to the trunk of a great chestnut-tree. There is much grandeur in the design of this tree, and the arrangement of the figures. Many contemporary landscape-painters, especially Mr. M'Callum, could draw a fine tree, with closer imitative veracity, but there is a magnificent passion in this design of Salvator's, and a determined intention to make us feel certain striking elements of forest sublimity, which are not common in any school, and always exceedingly rare amongst the literal designers. We are made thoroughly to feel the great height of the tree, and the vast reach of its far-spreading intricate branches. Its trunk rises like a lofty tower, and its clustered leaves poise themselves above our heads like the wings of innumerable birds. These qualities, however, might have been equally well given in a pen-drawing; and neither this, nor any other etching of Salvator, insists upon the especial advantages and superiorities of etching as an independent art. Salvator, like many other artists, employed etching as a convenient process for the multiplication of his drawings, just as in these days he might have employed the graphotype; but he was not, in the peculiar and especial sense, an etcher.

DIETRICH. *The Satyr in the Peasant's House*.—A satyr having paid a friendly visit to a peasant, accepts his hospitality, and attempts to eat hot soup with a spoon; but, not being accustomed to utensils of that kind, declines, with much energy of gesture, to repeat the experiment. There is plenty of vivacity in the action, and the group is engraved with considerable skill. I use the word *engraved* purposely, because this is rather engraving with the needle than free etching.

EVERDINGEN. *Cottages by a Torrent* (British Museum, Everdingen, vol. i. p. 19).—Two chalet-like cottages to the left; a stream flowing down amongst rocks over a weir made



PLATE V.

TREES,

**Part of a Landscape by WATERLOO.**

*Copied by the Author.*



# PLATE V.

(To be placed opposite page 116.)

## TREES, part of a Landscape by Waterloo.

*Copied by the Author.*

In this little landscape the organic lines and the shading are more distinctly separated than is common with the older masters. It may be taken as a good example of method. The plate passes through two distinct states, one for organic lines and the beginnings of deep shades, the other for light shadings, which are thrown over what is already done as a semi-transparent veil.

### BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
Clouds and distance . . . . .	8
Lightest parts of trees . . . . .	12
Foliage generally in light . . . . .	30
Dark parts of trees . . . . .	45
Trunks and figure . . . . .	55
Foreground . . . . .	65
<p>First proof taken. The plate was now covered again with black ground, and all the light shading was added. This was bitten from seven to twelve minutes.</p> <p>Second proof taken. A little light shading with dry-point was added here and there.</p>	
<p>In printing, the plate was cleaned with the hand, and then <i>retroussée</i> in the foreground and nearest tree to the right.</p>	





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of a trunk of pine ; rocks and rising land to the right ; pines and other trees. Four goats in the right corner, and three other goats on a shaded rock near the middle of the etching.

I think this is the most charming of all Everdingen's bits of wild river scenery. It is very fresh in treatment, and it is evident that the artist had a real liking for rocks and rude cottages by wooded hills and streams.

*The Man near a Gap in a Fence* (British Museum, Everdingen, vol. i. p. 19).—A little hill with a wooden cottage on it, and a wooden fence in front of the cottage all knocked down ; there are some pigs and goats, and a man who is walking down from the cottage happens to be near an opening in the fence—whence the title. The sky is clouded, and there are a few trees behind the building.

This subject, though simple, is agreeably composed, and much use is made of the variously-inclined stakes in the broken fence. In the quality of freshness this etching is equal to the preceding one, and both are above the usual average of the artist.

WATERLOO (the plate of which a portion is given here).—Waterloo often etched studies of trees, and this is one of the best examples amongst many plates of his. The reader will see that Waterloo had clear ideas of the richness, and fulness, and softness of foliage ; that he studied the projection of its masses, and could group his trees effectively. The black shadow, in the left-hand corner, forming a triangle with the edges of the plate, is a conventionalism very commonly found in the landscape-art of Waterloo's time.

WEIROTTER. *A River Scene* (British Museum, vol. ii. p. 56).—A group of boats, with sails, in the afternoon sunshine, their stems towards the spectator. Men are taking an anchor in a small boat to the right, and two men are rowing in another small boat to the left, over which is a windmill on



the shore. For its brilliant lighting, clear composition, and fine tonality, I think this is the best of all Weirötter's river subjects, and, on the whole, his most desirable etching.

*Civita Vecchia*.—A round tower to the left, from an opening in which men are bringing merchandise down an inclined plane to a boat. The tower and other buildings are relieved against dark trees, and there are large white clouds in the lower part of the sky, against which come the yards of several lateeners. The foreground is entirely water, calm, but slightly rippled, with boats. This is a very characteristic example of Weirötter, for it includes all the kinds of material which he most enjoyed. The plate is bright and effective; but a greater etcher would not have given to it such steady equality of labour. Weirötter could arrange a subject well, and had much manual ability; but he had not the wayward choice, the delicate emphasis, the charming caprices, and inimitably wise omissions of the nobler aquafortists.





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great compensating advantage, that the writing is not forced.

Zeeman was not noticed in the first edition of this work, because there did not seem to be any special reason for noticing him. He has a chapter in this edition, because from the direction of the most recent etching it is clear that the danger of contemporary students lies in the ambition to be elaborate, and especially in the desire to realise everything, without leaving anything to the imagination. The practice of some etchers of the Dutch school may be useful as an example of simplicity of treatment, and Zeeman especially is an excellent instance of this. I am far from wishing to set him up as a great etcher; he never was great, but he worked on clear and simple principles from which he never departed, and modern work may be done upon the same principles whenever we choose to adopt them. Zeeman's art was formal and naïf, and not nearly so rich in various knowledge and observation as the art of the most accomplished moderns, but it is quite possible to express much richer knowledge than he ever possessed by the means which he employed. There is no necessity to adhere minutely to his artistic recipe, it is enough to understand what is really worth attention in his principles.

His artistic recipe was to divide the scene into three *planes*—distance, middle distance, and foreground; the distance to be very pale, the middle distance rather dark, and the foreground invariably black. Sometimes there were four *planes*, in which case there would be two middle distances; but it was never consistent with Zeeman's recipe to have a light foreground and a dark distance, though such a combination occurs very frequently in nature.

We need not trouble ourselves about any recipe of this kind. Modern art has got far beyond that stage, and places, as nature does, its lights and darks where they are needed for the most various effects.



What we may learn from Zeeman and other artists of his time is the value of a clear decision about the interpretation of nature. His mind was quite made up about the extent to which he meant to go in realisation. All very luminous and even spaces were to be represented by blank paper, fine gradations in them being left to the imagination of the spectator. Shades and reflections were broadly and quietly given, it being always clear whether a mass was in shadow or in light. Texture was suggested by direction of line rather than by actual imitation of the quality of surfaces. One consequence, to Zeeman himself, of the adoption of these principles was that his works are never muddled by anxious experiments. All that he intended to do he could do without any painful struggling to put accident on his side. Therefore, it may be well for any one who is wearied with such struggling to remember that the true ark of safety is to be found in self-imposed limits to interpretation. In imposing such limits upon our intentions, we do not accept "imperfection," as it is sometimes called. All art which is perfect as far as it intends to go is wholly perfect, and truly, in the best sense, *finished*. In this sense Zeeman's etchings are more finished than a great deal of modern work which is far more laboured; and if the great purpose of art is to convey impressions, then these etchings are successful, for they always fully convey the impression which the artist intended to communicate.

**I. *Marine Subject.***—Two boats with sprit-sails and lee-boards are leaving shore. In the right-hand corner a man is hauling a small boat in with a boat-hook on the highest of seven stakes which rise out of the water. There are sails in the distance, and a square tower, with a glimpse of land. A few clouds in the sky, and birds to the right.

This etching quite gives the idea of a tranquil Dutch sea picture, with afternoon sunshine on calm water. The boats are drawn with perfect knowledge, and the reflections will



bear criticism. A little thing is often of much importance in art. Here the shadows cast by the sprits upon the sails give most of the impression of sunshine.

2. *Marine Subject.*—Here it is low tide, and a sloop is ashore on the right. There are several figures of men on the sands, and a group of boats are drying their sails in the middle distance. In the distance to the right we have a church, with a spire and other buildings; to the left, five boats with sails. The water is dead calm.

The distance and middle distance are very slightly bitten, and the sky a blank, except a few pale clouds and a little horizontal shading at the top. It was Zeeman's way sometimes, when he wanted to give an idea of calm sky, to rule a few horizontal lines at the top, and to the left, but he left the rest blank. From the length of the shadows cast this must be morning or evening. It is worth observing with how few lines the calm sea is represented. The whole distance is exquisite in temperance and delicacy.

3. *Marine Subject.*—Sailing-boats receding into distance, the nearest of them with a flag at the poop, as well as at the peak and mast-head, and a square-sail under the bowsprit, a man-of-war in the distance to the left, three punts and several men in the foreground.

Nothing is better adapted than shipping for the study of distances, because ships can be placed so conveniently at the intervals that the artist may desire. This plate, part of which is copied for the present work, is quite a model of this very useful kind of study. In the early stages of practice subjects of this kind will be found especially useful for the definite purpose which they give to three or four distinct and successive bitings, as the distances are marked by clear intervals, and not by difficult gradations.





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PLATE VI.

(To be placed opposite page 122.)

BOATS NEAR SHORE, part of a Plate by Zeeman.

*Copied by the Author.*

BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
The most distant boats, the clouds, and the sail of the nearest boat but one . . . . .	7
The nearest sailing boat, and the hull of the nearest but one .	15
Water near foreground . . . . .	20
Water in the immediate foreground . . . . .	30
Foreground figures . . . . .	45
Darkest things in foreground . . . . .	65

First proof taken.

The plate was now as intended, except that some of the palest lines, having been purposely overbitten (7 min.), had to be weakened with the scraper and burnisher, whilst other lines had to be introduced. This was done with the burin.

The plate is printed simply, with slight *retroussage*. It is wiped with canvas, not with the hand.













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## CHAPTER VIII.

### GOYA.

**I**T has not been part of the plan of this book to give either biographical detail, or much commentary on those qualities of artists which lie altogether outside of the artistic qualities. It is easy, under the pretext of art-criticism, to fill volumes both larger and more readable than this with matter in which purely artistic studies are a very inconsiderable ingredient; and I am clearly aware that a shrewder literary craftsman would have thrown the art of etching altogether into the background, and amused his readers with pleasant stories about the adventures of Salvator and the amorous intrigues of Goya. Resisting these temptations, I have kept in view one purpose only, the study of etching as an art, and have given space to etchers only so far as they have either really excelled in the art, or at least had the reputation of excelling in it.

Whoever cares to know about the life of Goya may find full information in M. Charles Yriarte's "Biography" (published by Plon, 10 Rue Garancière, Paris, 1867), which, though a narrative of facts, is the most extraordinary romance of artist-life imaginable. Goya was a man of very remarkable endowments outside of art. He had immense physical energy and courage, and at least as much moral audacity. He was ready to measure swords with any bully who might present himself, and sought adventures of this kind in the disorders of the public streets. His numerous illustrations of bull-fights are derived from personal experience in the



arena, but he defied things even more dangerous than any mere animal rage, for he was openly revolutionary in religion and politics, exposed himself to the hostility of the Inquisition, and even violated the rigid etiquette of the Court of Spain. His successes with the fair sex were innumerable; his strength and courage, his easy self-confidence and conquering address, made him a master in the arts of gallantry, and he had mistresses in every rank of life, from the women of the common people to the most exalted ladies of the court.

Goya had imagination, but of a frightful sort, like the imagination of a man suffering from delirium tremens; yet this imaginative familiarity with evil spirits does not seem to have affected the happiness of his existence, a happiness, such as it was, based on the substantial realities of the most robust health and complete professional success, with the satisfaction of all the appetites of an energetic animal nature. His etchings are the expression of his violent and ebullient personality; they are full of passion, but it is observable that there is no trace of any delicate or tender sentiment, or rather that what in other men would have been a sentiment of this kind, as, for instance, pity for the sufferings of the afflicted, takes, in Goya, the form of protest and antagonism, and becomes a furious cry of hatred against the oppressor. M. Yriarte tells us that in Spain there exist pictures by Goya which prove artistic delicacy and good taste, that there are passages of sweet colour, and feats of tranquil and loving finish; but I am compelled to doubt whether M. Yriarte's enthusiasm for the subject of his book may not have led him to regard those works too favourably. It is certain that he immensely exaggerates Goya's rank as an aquafortist, in attributing to him great technical skill, and especially in saying that he has "few rivals in the practice of his art." I have met with a small original etching by Goya, "The Prisoner," of which the copper belongs to M. Lefort, and that plate is good even





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*Bull-fighting: Plate 3.*—An artist who undertakes to illustrate the science of bull-fighting ought at least to be able to draw the parts of a bull. The ignorance of construction is here so complete, that the nostrils are represented by two small round holes, the eye is out of proportion and badly set, and the ear is not in its right place. There is not a single instance, in all the thirty-three illustrations of bull-fighting, of an eye or an ear even tolerably well drawn. In one or two plates the nostrils are a little better than these, but Goya's most general notion of a nostril, either in a bull or a horse, is a round hole bored with a large gimlet. He has never in a single instance drawn the ear of either animal.

*Bull fighting: Plate 7.*—Goya's childish ignorance of animal form was seldom more strikingly manifested than in the wretched little bull in the right-hand corner of this plate. There was no difficulty in the attitude, for it is the easiest of all possible attitudes; and, since it is the same as that of Paul Potter's bull, the reader may advantageously compare the two animals. Paul Potter had not the fire of Goya, nor his ferocity, but he condescended to study nature, which Goya did not, and so taught himself the proportions of the creature, and the shape of its most important joints. To begin at the ground, look at these hoofs and fetlocks! Could the bull gallop with them? Could he even stand on them?

*Bull-fighting: Plate 10.*—If you take an old rocking-horse, and char its head with fire, and then smear what remains of its face with thick white paint, you will possess, in sculpture, a work of art, accurately corresponding in scientific truths and artistic value to this wonderful horse of Goya. The combination of ignorance with assurance never ended in the production of art more hideously corrupt. Its formlessness is like the falling away of the putrefied flesh. The art here is not merely lifeless, but it is rotten—not a pleasant word to use, but the most appropriate.

*Caprices: Plate 23, Aquellos Polbos.*—The first two



words of a Spanish proverb, which means, "From this dust comes that mud." The subject is a woman condemned by the Inquisition, and clothed in the frightful and fantastic costume which its victims had to wear. It is the nearest approach to good etching by Goya that I remember. The figure is simply and vigorously indicated, and there is nothing unnatural or distorted in the attitude.

*Caprices : Plate 30, Porque esconderlos ?* ("Why hide them?")—An old man wants to hide his money-bags, and his heirs are laughing at him, because they know that, however closely he clutches them, his death will shortly place them in other hands. Nothing can exceed the hideousness and baseness of these figures ; and the curious thing is that Goya evidently liked to contemplate such baseness.

*Caprices : Plate 36, Mala Noche.*—Two wretched women out in a dark, windy night, their dresses blown about. There is some poetry here, of a terrible kind, and the plate is impressive. Goya's system of aquatinting for light and shade, though artistically far more less complete than Turner's mezzotint, from the all but total absence of gradation, is here sufficient for his purpose, and gives the necessary violence of opposition to the white petticoats of the women, and the necessary blackness to the night.

The etchings of Goya are in several different series : *The Caprices*, 80 plates ; *The Disasters of War*, 80 plates ; *Bull-fighting*, 33 plates ; *The Proverbs* ; and *The Prisoners*. He also etched a series of horses after Velasquez, and a series of dwarfs after the same master, besides many original separate plates. Many of these are now rare, and I have only studied about two hundred of Goya's etchings ; enough, however, to convince me that, though he had certainly the genius of a satirist, and plenty of imagination of the most horrible kind, his etchings have little artistic value, and owe their great fame to the fascination of their incomparable horror, and a kind of philosophical reflection whose bitterness suits our taste.



## CHAPTER IX.

### *JONGKIND.*

**I**N the first edition of this work I noticed Jongkind in a chapter devoted chiefly to the minor Frenchmen, but further study has decided me to give him a chapter to himself, as it happens that the qualities he relies upon are still most rare in the modern schools. The purpose of his art as an etcher may be explained in a few words. All landscape-painters make memoranda of impressions, which must of necessity be done very rapidly if they are to be worth anything, because the effects in nature change so fast that they cannot be sketched at all by a slow hand. Jongkind has so far trusted to the intelligence of the public (or of the small cultivated public to which he addresses himself), as to make memoranda of impressions directly upon copper, and print them. This is the whole explanation of his work as an etcher. But now comes the person living outside of art, who, when he sees one of these etchings, feels first puzzled and then offended, and thinks that both artist and laudatory critic must be making fun of him. "Could not any child of ten years old do as well?" The true answer to this question (it is not an imaginary question) is, that, rude as this sketching looks, and imperfect in many respects as it really is, the qualities which belong to it are never attained in art without the combination of talent approaching to genius, and study of a very observant and earnest kind, quite beyond any possible experience of infancy. The right way to estimate work of this nature is to look upon it as the artist's





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He gives as few lines as possible, never dissimulating them, and never attempting any shade or gradation that would require much craft of biting. Such biting as he does give is quite simple and decided, about three bitings to each plate—a good vigorous black (no mistake about that), a middle tint, and a pale tint for distance. The shading is generally open, but runs very close for contrast in some passages, such as the black hull of a ship. He is always careful to economise labour in shading for fear of spoiling the vivacity of his plate, which it is so very easy to do. Thus the open sky with him is blank paper, and so is calm water, only waves and reflections being indicated by lines. He sketches clouds in frank line, broad and bitten shallow. He resorts also sometimes to a kind of blotting, like that of the ink in pen-sketching.

*The town of Maasslins, Holland.*—A skating scene on a canal to the right, elevated above the level of a plain to the left, and divided from it by an embankment. There is a great windmill to the left, and the town with its churches is in the distance. Plate dated 1862.

Readers who have studied Topffer will remember what he says about the difference between identity and resemblance. If an artist draws a thing quite accurately, he gives, not something resembling the form, but the actual form itself as it strikes the retina. But it is possible to give a resemblance of the form, very remote from identity, and yet much more interesting to the spectators, interesting even from the very contradiction between its demonstrable inaccuracy, and its curious look of truth. This may account for the strange interest of the skating figures in this composition. Are they men and women? Certainly not, for men and women so constructed could never walk—much less could they skate. They are mere puppets, no more, yet such lively puppets that they give us the notion of *skating*, far better than more elaborately drawn figures would do if



their action had been less happily conveyed, whilst from the system of execution used being exactly the same as that for the surrounding landscape, they harmonise with it perfectly. It is very interesting to notice with how little labour Jongkind suggests a gradation. One is suggested (not realised) in the water, and another in the cloud near the mill. The spectator's imagination immediately supplies what is wanting.

*Entrance to the Port of Honfleur.* (Dated 1863).—As there are no clouds in this sky, the artist has wisely left it perfectly blank, because white paper (or paper with the slight tint left by the ink when the plate has not been cleared with whitening) expresses the serenity of the pure sky with a perfection that would be most probably lost if any attempt were made to shade it, whilst the gradation in the shading would probably be too imperfect to satisfy a delicate taste. We are made at once to feel that the light comes from the spectator's left by the shadows from the two masts of the brig, which fall towards the right. The water is expressed by a few widely-separated wave-marks. There is a little very light tinting of transparent shade upon the pier and distant houses. The steamer close to the pier (apparently a mere confusion of blotted black lines) is a very clever representation of the *effect* of a steamer upon the eye at that distance. There are two cutter-rigged boats to the left in the middle distance, and a rowing-boat with four men in it, over the signature. All these are remarkable for great liveliness and motion, and, as in all Jongkind's etchings, when anything is moving at all we are made to see and feel that it is moving.

*View of the Railway Port at Honfleur.* (Dated 1866.)—A singularly awkward subject to choose, with disagreeable perspective lines of rail and quay edge, and a perfectly blank space in the middle. It is worth study only for its perfect unity and truth of impression, for it gives you exactly the



feeling of being at one of those uncomfortable railway ports where you are generally liable to be run over by a waggon, and to be tripped up by a rope in attempting to get out of its way. The sky is cleverly treated with its few thin diagonal clouds, and the calm water to the left is expressed with a few wavy lines for prolonged reflection from boat and vessels. If the reader has the plate, by all means let him observe the very summary execution of the little cock-boat with its two inhabitants.

*Sortie du port de Honfleur.* (1864.)—To my feeling this is the best of Jongkind's plates. It is composed of water and sky, with shipping and boats, and there is a lighthouse on the shore in the distance on the right hand, and a large building to the left. The sky is cloudy, and darkens to the right with powerful open shading, so energetic that it seems as if done with sabre-strokes, but it is not deeply bitten. The black hull and masts of the brig in the foreground to the left are bitten very energetically, and are a very fine example of powerful treatment of near material. The water is translated by open lines indicating ripple, or a generally calm surface and reflection, both being expressed with great knowledge, though most laconically. There is some particularly clever treatment of shallow broad lines about the steamer to the right, and some masterly black blotting as in a pen-sketch. As usual, there is much motion in the boats that move under sail or oar, which enhances the tranquil majesty of the stationary brig.





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M. de Gravesande\* has published two portfolios of etchings, the first consisting of thirteen plates, including the title, the second of ten plates. In each collection there are etchings which might have been omitted without loss, simple studies from nature, without sufficient artistic significance to afford a substantial reason for publication. It is necessary to draw the line somewhere, and I think it ought to be drawn between works which have composition, or what looks like it; that is some relation between their component parts, and those in which there is no such relation. Simple studies of objects are valuable to the artist, but may be kept for his private use.†

*Le lac d'Abconde.*—Part of a lake with a flat shore. Two windmills and some trees in the distance, pollard willow, and rushes in the foreground, to the right. A sailing-boat on the water, and also a small boat in which a man is sculling. Long clouds slightly sketched in the sky, and a few wild ducks.

The most noticeable thing here is the treatment of the water, which is full of real knowledge, expressed with the utmost simplicity of method. There is a broad band of ripple in the distance, then a calmer interval which reflects

\* Carel Nicolaas Storm van S'Gravesande is a Dutch gentleman, with the title of Jonkeer, and a son of the Vice-President of the house of Representatives, who is also a member of the Council of State. He studied for the bar, and took the degree of Doctor of Law at the University of Leyden, but, having a strong taste for art, quitted legal studies for the career of a painter, to which he has remained faithful since, for the occasional pursuit of etching can scarcely be considered an infidelity to the Muse of Painting, however jealous she may be. As the subject of this notice published his etchings at Brussels he translated his name into French for the convenience of the southern public, and called himself Charles de Gravesande.

† It appears, too, as if in his second publication M. de Gravesande had associated together plates too widely different from each other in size, so that the smaller ones are injured by too much margin, a matter well worth noticing, as it happens to engage our attention. It is a great mistake to suppose that a margin *cannot* be too large. An unreasonably wide space of margin makes an etching (or drawing) look insignificant instead of enhancing its importance.



the windmill, or rather just recognises it. The boat is sailing on another space of ripple, and little waves come washing in amongst the rushes. The group of trees in the distance is treated comprehensively in masses, but the pollard willows to the right seem coarsely drawn when you think of the delicate beauty of a real willow.

*Au bord du Gein près Abconde.*—This is one of the most perfect etchings produced by the modern schools, so perfect, indeed, that if I were restricted to the possession of six modern etchings this should be one of them. The material is nothing but a river shore with a few trees and bushes, and a windmill. The sky and water are both great tranquil spaces of white paper, the one varied by four or five very light streaks of cloud, and a few birds, the other by bits of vegetation rising above the surface, and a ripple here and there. It is not at all an exaggeration to say that the tender and delicate beauty of the shading on the windmill and distant foliage, and of the corresponding reflections in the water, is equal in the quality of softness to the softest work in a chalk or charcoal drawing, whilst in the strong deeply-bitten markings on the nearer shore and foreground there are a vigour and decision which belong to etching alone. This etching is indeed a perfect model for three great qualities whose union is rare indeed. It is both very tender and very strong, and at the same time very reserved in the best and wisest way. The consequence is the harmony of a complete impression, in which nothing is insufficient and nothing excessive. The reserve is most visible in the treatment of water and sky. An etcher has to choose, for open sky, between the tranquillity of blank paper and the gradation to be obtained by shading. The gain by shading is doubtful, because the gradation is likely to come wrong; the loss in any case is certain, because no shading can ever have the purity and repose which in blank paper come so near to the quality of sky. Therefore in an etch-



ing like this, the blank paper is far from being meaningless ; it means the spotless, lineless texture of sky and water which in nature is so pure.

*L'Escaut à Burght, près Anvers.*—A shore with a small jetty and landing-stage, boats in the foreground, and a steamer and sailing vessels in the distance. This plate is beautifully composed (observe, for example, the utility of the two oars), and the distant boats are skilfully introduced. M. de Gravesande's boats and boatmen are always full of life, even when the man is a speck on shore or the sail a speck on the horizon ; and his study of water deserves praise for thoroughness and temperance, for its true indication of the perspective of rippling surfaces, and that delicate noting of reflections which marks what is most faintly perceptible, and rejects all arbitrary theories of what the water phenomena ought to be for a subtly intelligent observation of what they are.

*Entree de forêt.*—The entrance of a dense pine-forest, no sky visible nor any distance, as the eye can only penetrate a few yards into the gloom amongst the trunks of the pines. In the foreground is a narrow and rough road going into the forest.

This plate is almost entirely etched in strong, deeply-bitten markings, like Turner's etched work. It is one of the most impressive sylvan subjects I ever met with, and at once reminds us of Dante. Not only are the deep markings well etched, but there are also most skilful shadings and *salissures* of the copper between the lines.

*Le Retour de la Pêche.*—Women coming back from the fishing on the sea-shore under a high cliff. They are just descending a rude wooden stair set against a strong sea-wall, with massive beams and planks.

This large plate is more in the direction of tone etching than the artist's earlier works. The cliff is all in shade, and so are the figures. The wood-work is powerfully etched





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## CHAPTER XI.

### *MODERN GERMANS AND OTHERS.*

**I**T was not the original design of this book to mention any artists but those who etched their own compositions, for when an etcher interprets a picture he ceases to act as a creative artist, and becomes merely a translator. The important position, however, which etching has assumed of late years as one of the branches of engraving, will not permit me to pass in silence so accomplished an executant as Unger, but since for the same reason it has become necessary to mention several other etchers from pictures, I have preferred to group them together in a chapter towards the end of the volume, in which their special branch of the art is studied in a more connected way than it could have been if the materials had been scattered throughout the book. It would be impossible, in such a chapter, to omit the works of William Unger, and at the same time it would be very difficult to do him justice when occupied with original etchers, because an entirely peculiar kind of criticism has to be applied to an etcher who interprets painters. There is always, in such a case, a great risk of confounding the painter and etcher together, and of attributing to the latter merits which are not his own, or shortcomings for which he ought not to be held responsible. A critic will therefore do wisely to keep the two classes of etchers apart, and the same reasons may make the separation a convenience to the reader also by removing some causes of perplexity.

Amongst original modern German etchers, the best of



those known to me is Gauermann. His etchings of animals are often delicately accurate in detail, and in such a piece of work as the drawing of a goat's horn he will often prove a rather surprising skill. It would have been no more than justice to give him a separate chapter, or at least to study one or two of his principal plates, and some readers may think it strange that so hasty a sketcher as Jongkind should be so honoured when Gauermann is passed with a simple mention. Let me explain, therefore, that in my view of the art, which will probably be found to be the correct one, no accomplishment in the representation of details, however exquisitely they may be done, can atone for the absence of that far higher kind of study which sees things in their mutual relations as parts of an artistic whole. Accuracy in separate detail may be reached with painstaking, by workmen of the most ordinary intelligence. Open any French book of science or travel, illustrated carefully by the best wood-engravers of the day, and you will find details of the most astonishing minuteness, often almost rivalling those of the photograph; indeed this very clever handicraft has been carried to such a pitch of perfection of late years, that it seems impossible for it to be carried farther. Such study of detail in scientific or mechanical illustration is precious for its utility, but in the fine arts detail is never precious unless in absolute subordination to some artistic scheme which embraces the whole work, and even then the detail is worth having only just so far as it helps the greater unity in its effect upon the mind. The study of detail for itself is positively injurious to comprehensiveness of sight. Examine a leaf on a tree, and whilst your attention is occupied with the individual leaf, you will not see the branch as a whole, still less will you see it in its true relation to the background of hill or sky. The most idle of all idle occupations is to spend time in "finishing" things which will never take their proper place in the com-



position. Until everything is in its right place it is no use thinking about finish, and when the parts are in right relations to each other, very little finish will be needed. The enormous Kunstverein (German Art Union) etchings are amongst the most curious examples of wasted labour in the world. The hastiest scrawl of any artist who can truly see half-a-dozen things at once is worth a lifetime of such mistaken industry. Mere skill with the fingers and patience in labour, without selection, without comprehensiveness, without emphasis, without passion, are offensive in proportion to their very success. The more a dull etcher practises the art, and the more assiduously he trains himself in the sort of base dexterity which dulness devises, the more hopeless does his work become.

The full severity of these remarks is deserved by the work of the true German Philistines, but there are some Germans whom it would be unjust to write against quite so energetically. Gauermann, above mentioned, is not dull, but only rather too observant of truth in detail to see truth in mass. The landscapes of Zimmermann and Wurthle are not without some comprehensive energy, but still not sufficiently free and intuitive for great etching, and Morgenstern (who punningly signs himself Morgen\*) is somewhat bolder than Zimmermann, but deficient in lightness and grace. Eberle finishes cleverly in a pretty modern way, and Brennhausner is skilful to a degree which only makes one regret the misapplication of his abilities.

It has happened, since the first edition of this book appeared, that many etchers in different countries have sent proofs of their plates to me. In this way I have enjoyed opportunities for becoming better acquainted with the state of the art in different parts of the world. The tradition of the old Dutch etching lingered into our own century in the person of an etcher named Trooftwyk, who died young, and left a little series of plates behind him, which were founded





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deceptive relief. Figures are set in strong lamp-light against black backgrounds till they stand out like models, and they are shaded with a completeness that leaves nothing to the imagination. There can be no question, however, as to the manual and technical power with which the purpose is accomplished; sometimes, indeed, the technical power is so striking, that a more refined artist might well envy the possession of it. In "Un Rimprovero" a wife is taking a malicious pleasure in letting her husband know that she is aware of some infidelity; the woman's face is for the most part in strong shadow, and it would be difficult to find in the greatest works of the greatest masters a more thorough piece of work than the shading of that face, in which every gradation is attended to, and every reflection, even to the faintest. The different expressions of the two faces are as life-like as they possibly can be, but all this technical and other ability is employed to tickle the tastes of a very low section of the vulgar continental public.

Etching is now practised in every country sufficiently advanced in civilisation for any thorough culture of the fine arts. Paris is the metropolis of etching, but of what is done there this is not the place to speak. There is a good deal of etching activity in places often too scattered for good results. The position of an etcher, for example, in some remote locality in America or Australia, is not favourable to rapid progress, because he may be stopped by technical difficulties in what French artists call *la cuisine de l'eau forte*, or he may not direct his studies from nature towards the kind of skill and knowledge which is specially most useful to an aquafortist. An isolated etcher, however, is better off than an isolated painter, because he can easily get examples of good work which may be purchased cheaply when rarity is not an object, whereas good pictures are always costly things, and the isolated painter sees little but his own canvases. Very curious instances of the effects of isolation



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reach me from out-of-the-way places in different parts of the world. For example, an American sent me a series of large etchings of lake scenery in his own country, in which all the trees were well drawn, some of them even remarkably well drawn, with a strong sense of sylvan beauty, and much evidence of observant study; yet, at the same time, all the other components of lake scenery, mountains, water, rocks, and foreground vegetation, were done with exactly the degree of knowledge which is common in the works of school-girls. Now, if this etcher had not been so much isolated, some artist-friend would have told him to direct his studies more equally. Other solitary students get into difficulties with their chemicals, not being able to deal properly with acid and copper. They complain, too, of their distance from a competent printer who would test their plates in various ways. Then they let themselves be influenced by friends who know nothing about the art, or about any art, and so toil after false finish. The consequence is that there is very little *good* etching done anywhere in the world by students who are not in communication with Paris and the leading etchers there.









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# CHAPTER I.

## *THE REVIVAL OF ETCHING IN FRANCE.*

**F**OR the last fifteen years the practice of etching has gradually become a more and more important branch of artistic work in France, and now the French school is not only the most active in Europe, but it is so influential that all other schools are directly affected by it. At first the art was revived by a few isolated artists, including some of the most distinguished painters, who etched a few plates for their own satisfaction. In this way Eugène Delacroix etched a little, so did Meissonier, Daubigny etched more, Charles Jacque gave still more attention to the art, and at last a great number of painters pursued etching sufficiently to attain a certain degree of skill. Then came Méryon, who did not succeed as a painter, but gave himself entirely to etching, and so expressed a rare and original genius. Lalanne, too, a very clever artist in black-and-white, who worked but little in colour, found etching much to his taste, and produced many plates. Martial, a very accurate draughtsman of streets and buildings, became a most productive etcher, and issued hundreds of careful studies on copper, which proved his mastery of the process. Jules Jacquemart, who had worked before in water-colour, took to etching with the rest, and astonished every one by an unexampled truth and delicacy in the rendering of still life, so that his works were at once appreciated by all who valued beautiful representations of beautiful things. In this way the impulse was given, and the art was alive again. Then



a young and energetic publisher, M. Alfred Cadart, determined to devote himself to the publication of etchings, and gathered round him the scattered artists and amateurs who had revived the art. He founded a club, called the "*Société des Aquafortistes*," which published some fine things, and a good many plates that tried to be fine but were not; yet, however defective may have been many of these attempts, they were singularly free from the *bourgeois* or Philistine spirit, and addressed themselves to the appreciation or to the indulgence of the genuine critic or artist, rarely to the tastes of the vulgar. The *Société* issued a monthly publication of five plates, which gave place later to a smaller periodical issue, called *L'Illustration Nouvelle*, in which a more equally good quality was aimed at, and in some measure attained. Finally, in 1874, M. Cadart began to issue an annual portfolio of much higher average quality than either of the two monthly publications. During the twelve years which elapsed from 1862, he had also published a great number of independent collections of etchings by various artists, many of which deserved the serious attention of the public.

Although M. Cadart was the only French publisher, and, indeed, the only publisher in the world, who has made etching his specialty, several others in Paris have included it amongst other kinds of engraving which they brought before the public. The most noteworthy instance of this is its employment by M. Hachette for his unprecedented edition of the four Gospels, illustrated by Bida with 128 pictorial compositions, which were all etched by Bida himself and fifteen other etchers. The enormous sum of money lavished on the production of this work would never have been risked twenty years ago on an enterprise which depended upon etching for its success. At that time a publisher determined to invest fifty thousand pounds in a monumental enterprise would have selected line-engraving as a matter of course, and the intensity of the general





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disseminating lithographs and engravings of various kinds, many of which have been of a high character. It has never been exclusive with regard to the kind of engraving employed, and it willingly admitted etchings of the most artistic kind (such as those of Charles Jacque and Daubigny) at a time when they were by no means generally popular. The editors appear to have consulted very different tastes, for some of the lithographs which they inserted could with difficulty have been tolerated by any one capable of appreciating the etchings, and they even gratified lady-subscribers with coloured plates of the fashions. What is truly painful, however, is not so much to see common art admitted into a periodical as to see great art systematically excluded because it is not likely to please the multitude, and the credit which *L'Artiste* deserves is for not having excluded work of a high kind, which always appeals to a limited and cultivated public of its own. Along with much that was coarse or meretricious in taste, this periodical has issued some of the very best work, both in lithography and etching, which has ever been produced in Europe; and if the revival of etching is traced to its sources it will be evident that one of those sources is the manner in which *L'Artiste* was edited, and the liberality with which it provided for the tastes of a minority. It not only encouraged Daubigny and Charles Jacque at the commencement of their careers, but it has since then encouraged other genuine artists, such as Flameng, Veyrassat, Bracquemond, Soumy, and Queyroy. The foundation of the *Gazette*, which occurred much later (in 1857), was also a fortunate occurrence for the development of etching. This periodical has been favourable to etching, not only directly by the publication of etched plates, but also indirectly, by keeping itself, with admirable consistency, far above all condescension to the *bourgeois* or Philistine spirit, both in its criticisms and its illustrations, most especially perhaps in the courageous



practice of printing the honest rough sketches of artists just as they made them. There are hundreds of things in the volumes of the *Gazette* which it is utterly impossible that any Philistine should understand, and which must seem to the *bourgeois* mind as ugly as they are incomprehensible ;\* so, as the periodical addressed itself to the educated public only, it could employ etching, and has done so with good results. The effect of an encouragement given to a particular branch of art is often felt afterwards in unexpected directions. Trained by working for the *Gazette*, a group of etchers found themselves able to undertake work of a like quality beyond the limits of the periodical, and this led to the habit of etching galleries of pictures, or selections from them, a practice the limits of which it is impossible to foresee.

The influence of one man is sometimes of the very greatest importance even in those movements which appear to be the result of a tendency generally prevalent. Thus, in the revival of etching, the engraver Léopold Flameng has given a strong impulse to one branch of the art, that which concerns itself with the interpretation of painting. He was born at Brussels, of French parents, in 1831. At the age of sixteen he was a sufficiently good engraver to contribute plates of his own to a publication on the galleries of Florence. As his knowledge of art increased, so did his feelings of rebellion against the kind of engraving which at that time was considered the only legitimate kind. He could not endure the pursuit of mechanical regularity as an aim in itself, and soon perceived that the greatest artists of the past had been superior to such an idle pre-occupation.

\* Such pen-sketches, for example, as the *Martyre de St. Laurent*, from a picture by M. Lehoux, drawn by the author (published June 1874), and the *Lever de Lune à Ermenonville*, from a picture by M. Moullion, drawn by the author (published August 1874). The boldness with which the *Gazette* publishes things of this kind, which are perfectly intelligible to artists, but sure to irritate the ignorant, proves that the periodical in question relies upon a very highly cultivated public.



“Nanteuil, Edelinck, Drevet,” says Flameng in a letter to me, “n’étaient pas esclaves de la *taille militaire* (ainsi nommée par M. Charles Blanc) des travaux bien alignés et des *élégants treillages* (expression d’Ingres) ils ne recherchaient que la perfection du dessin, la grâce et la souplesse dans l’exécution.” Flameng perceived, too, that in the work of the great time there had been a certain rapidity in production. A picture of importance was finished, and followed very shortly by an engraving from it. “Edelinck ne mettait qu’un mois à graver un portrait admirable !” Flameng felt much discouraged by the condition of public taste in his own time. Great engraving seemed to be killed outright—killed by Wille and Bervic, who gratified the public taste for mechanical regularity by an extreme purity of incision and an excessive manual skill, which it became their chief purpose to display. “These men,” says Flameng, “were not artists, but ingenious artisans. To the misfortune of modern art they transmitted their skill and their artistic ignorance, and even at the present day they condemn their successors, who follow the same path, to spend long years upon plates which dazzle the eyes with a superficial brilliance beneath which is nothing. It is like the silk dress on a lay figure.”

In Flameng’s opinion the commercial death of line-engraving was not due to photography, as has been supposed, but to the excessive striving after mechanical perfection, which involved such a terrible sacrifice of time. Publishers abandoned it because, after investing great sums of money, they had to wait many years before the plate could be ready for publication, so that the general interest in the subject of it had often already evaporated. Flameng perceived that etching had not this inconvenience of slowness, that an etched plate might be produced in a reasonable time, and that the great etchers had not troubled themselves about that mechanical regularity which is the bane of art. He therefore resolved to study etching especially, and see





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criticism, for the one or two men in a generation whom posterity is likely to remember. The epithet is not misplaced in this instance. Flameng is really one of those illustrious men whose labours make epochs in the history of the fine arts. He is a thoroughly great engraver, an artist-engraver of the highest rank. Even if isolated, he would have had a place in the history of art; much more then is he secure of such a place through the tradition already established by his pupils, such as Laguillermie, Massaloff, and others. Though but just in the noon of life, Flameng is already *chef d'école*, and chief of a school such as has not been seen since the days of Rembrandt; a school which interprets painting with a sympathy, freedom, and power, which are not to be found in the same degree in any other class of engravers. M. Léon Gaucherel has a place too in the history of art, for the same reason. "My best works," he says with a beautiful modesty, "are my pupils." Amongst them may be counted such artists as Rajon, Le Rat, Courty, Duclos, Lalauze.

The one thing which strikes us in this French revival of etching is the sustained and extended energy of the movement. Although some English newspaper-writers, even in considerable journals, are only just now beginning to be really aware that there is such an art as etching, and are wondering and laughing at it as a strange half-intelligible new thing, like South Sea islanders when some puzzling astronomical apparatus is landed upon their shores,\* the plain truth is that the French revival was begun more than twenty years ago, and has been gathering strength ever since. And in saying this I am much within the truth; for if you take as examples the careers of two living veterans, Charles Jacque and Daubigny, you will discover that their earliest plates were produced before 1840. The very first plate by Jacque is dated ten years earlier, but that is a copy

\* See a quotation from the *Times* newspaper in the chapter on the Revival of Etching in England.



after Rembrandt, a worthy beginning. Observe too that since 1840 Jacque has steadily continued, and that in 1866 his *œuvre* amounted already to 420 plates. Daubigny began to etch in 1838, and in 1841 he exhibited several etchings at the Salon. Méryon was at work on his series of Parisian subjects in 1850. Flameng exhibited in 1855. These dates are quite sufficient to show that the movement is not of yesterday, though the general public is only just now beginning to be aware of it.

The great increase in the *number* of etchers dates from 1860 or thereabouts. It would be better for any fine art that its practitioners should be few and able, if that were possible, rather than numerous and for the most part unskilful. What really happens, however, in the history of the fine arts is this :—There are many mediocrities in a generation, and a few men of true genius, so that it almost seems as if, in the arrangements of nature, the crowd were necessary in order that the men of genius might be produced. There is a general state of sentiment amongst those who concern themselves about art, which urges them in some especial direction at a particular time ; and the men of genius either lead the crowd, drawing it after them, or else go with the crowd at first, and afterwards rise out of the midst of it, lifting themselves, as it were, upon its shoulders. Charles Jacque, Daubigny, and Flameng, were leaders, pioneers ; Rajon, Le Rat, Laguillermie, followed a movement already begun, but rose higher than most of those who followed it.

Few movements in art have been, on the whole, so decidedly successful as this revival of etching in France. It will occupy a very important place in the artistic history of the nineteenth century. The chiefs of the revival have not only made etching quite truly a living art again, but they have pursued a course of study so wisely chosen that it has led them to an absolute executive equality with the very greatest etchers of the past. The art is not merely alive



again, but it is alive in perfect strength. Never, indeed, in the history of the fine arts have so many thoroughly accomplished etchers been gathered together within the walls of a single city as there are at this hour in Paris. We do not live in some short after-glow, some partial return of splendour passed away, but in the full bright light of the morning.\*

\* Since this chapter was written, a new art periodical has been started in Paris on a scale more important than either of its predecessors. The name of this new magazine is *L'Art*; it is published weekly, and each number contains, in addition to other illustrations, one etching regularly, with the occasional addition of another. The principal living etchers are on the list of contributors, and their chief business is the reproduction of pictures. The advantage of *L'Art* over other periodicals is the great size of its pages, which are in quarto grand colombier, a size measuring seventeen inches by twelve. The first number contained a remarkably clever plate, by Rajon, from a picture by Pieter de Hooe in the National Gallery (the Courtyard of a Dutch House), but it is quite impossible for any periodical to keep up to that level regularly; there are not enough first-rate etchers in the world to do the work. However, the proprietors of *L'Art* seem determined to enlist the best ability of the day, and if their venture succeeds, as we may hope that it will, the art of etching from pictures will be supported by three periodicals in Paris. It would be well, perhaps, if these periodicals gave rather more encouragement, proportionally, to the independent art of etching, which has aims and purposes of its own not unfrequently forgotten in the anxiety to interpret, by great labour and often with doubtful success, the tones and textures of painting. But of this I shall have more to say in another place.





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claims to our consideration, and he is so strong on these points that such accomplished moderns as Haden and Samuel Palmer have a great reverence for his name. Add to these qualities a certain freedom and spirit in his lines, which served him well in near masses of foliage, and a singularly perfect tonality in one or two remarkable plates, and you have the grounds of his immortality as an etcher. He was great in this sense, but not great in range of intellectual perception, and his genius at the best is somewhat feminine. He has left a few unimportant and weak etchings, but he has also left half-a-dozen masterpieces, which the severest criticism must respect. One merit of his is not common in his modern successors—the extreme modesty of his style; no etcher was ever less anxious to produce an impression of cleverness, and his only object seems to have been the simple rendering of his ideas. He sincerely loved beauty and grace, and tried innocently for these till his touch became gentler than that of a child's fingers, yet so accomplished that the stubborn copper was caressed, as it were, into a willing obedience.

*Le Bouvier : second state* (Dumesnil, i. 13, 8).—A herdsman is seated near a pool of water which his cows are crossing. Beyond the pool is a magnificent group of trees. To the left of these trees are the remains of a temple, and, above the herdsman, a distance with hills. For technical quality of a certain delicate kind this is the finest landscape etching in the world. Its transparency and gradation have never been surpassed. The most wonderful passages are in the great masses of foliage which have been, as it were, tenderly painted and glazed with the point. The composition is very beautiful; and, though the study of nature is less accurate than in some modern work, there is a noble movement in the trees which accurate draughtsmen often miss, and which an etcher, of all artists, is bound to interpret and preserve.

*Le Soleil couchant : second state* (Dumesnil, i. 19, 15).—



A seaport at sunset. To the left, an arch of triumph in shadow, and trees; then a round tower, some battlements, and a square tower; after which two ships, and a distance of hilly coast. To the right is another tower, near which is the setting sun.

This etching is remarkable for the inexpressible tenderness of its sky. When heretics and unbelievers say that skies cannot be done in etching, it is always convenient to answer them with a reference to this plate; but the truth is that although the sky is marvellously tender, and in this respect undoubtedly the finest ever etched, the cloud-forms are so simple and so little defined that Claude's success in this instance has not solved more than one of the great sky-problems.

*Le Troupeau en Marche par un temps d'orage* (Dumesnil, i. 22, 18).—Easily recognised by the massive fragment of a ruined temple to the left. The temple has Corinthian columns, of which three only are visible. A flock of cattle and goats is driven by a man and a dog in the direction of the temple. In the middle distance, to the right, is a rising ground with a castle on it. Between the castle and the temple is a lake with a village on its shore, and beyond the lake, in the extreme distance, are mountains. The reader is recommended to study more particularly the third state.

Claude seems to have had a sensitive and delicate nature, more capable of enjoying the softly gradated sky of a fine afternoon than the grandeur of gathering storm. The sky here is curiously feeble and ineffectual, but the etching is one of Claude's best, and especially deserves to be studied for the piece of ruined temple, which is etched more firmly and substantially than any other piece of architecture by him.

*La Danse villageoise* (Dumesnil, i. 28, 24).—What follows refers to the first state only. The subject is generally exceedingly pale, and Claude has here made an experiment in the direction of mezzotint, by slightly roughening the



surface of his copper to obtain a tinted distance. The foliage is exceedingly graceful, and, though the plate is obviously an experiment, and an unsuccessful one, it is by no means the least interesting of the series.

*Scène de Brigands* (Dumesnil, i. 16, 12).—There is a mass of trees to the left, at the foot of which are dock-leaves. Towards the bottom of the trunk these trees are crossed by a palm-tree, and under the palm-tree a man is attacked by brigands. The distance is mountainous, and the middle distance wooded. The point of interest here is the contrast between the firmness and brilliancy of definition in the palm-leaves and other foreground foliage, and the tender quality of work in the distance and sky.

*Berger et Bergère conversant* (Dumesnil, i. 25, 21).—Not so rich in tone as some other etchings of Claude, but free and grand in manner. The trees to the right have a stately grace, and there is an extreme elegance in the tree that divides the composition. There are some rolling clouds, and there is little repose in the unquiet lines of the foreground; but the shepherd and shepherdess can have their talk without paying much heed to so finely artistic a consideration.

*La Danse sous les arbres : second state* (Dumesnil, i. 14, 10).—The central figure is a woman with short petticoat; above her a group of trees. To the left is a woman with tambourine, and four villagers are seated on the trunk of a fallen tree. Foliage enriches the subject to the right and left, and between the trees we perceive openings of hilly distance. This plate is remarkable only for the manual freedom in the foliage.





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a composition in itself, and this leads us to one of Callot's most curious defects. His larger subjects are not complete compositions, but half-a-dozen minor compositions fastened together in a sort of panorama. Any one of these, taken by itself, looks more like a picture than the whole engraving did, with its superabundance of ill-arranged material. In this respect Callot differed as widely as possible from the modern French school, which has understood that unity is the first necessity of art, and has also perceived that a large simplicity of subject is one of the easiest means by which unity can be attained. Callot's power of composition was often very great in little groups and bits, if considered separately; for example, there is a group of horses taken to bathe in the river just under the Tour de Nesle, which is grand enough to be a sketch for a noble picture; the composition of it is as fine as it can be, but utterly thrown away in the midst of so distracting a plate, where there is so much conflicting material. What really secured Callot's fame was the original and very life-like manner in which he treated his figures. He had endless inventions in putting his little people into what seemed natural groups. They are often defectively drawn, glaringly out of proportion, and interpreted with the strongest mannerism, but they act and live in the great human comedy, and not even the most insignificant of them are mere lay figures or dolls. As to their proportions, the heads are generally too small, often ludicrously so. Durer gave the head as an eighth of the body, and the antique sculptors made it rather larger. Callot makes it sometimes a ninth, and sometimes even a tenth. In the plate entitled,

*Ces pauvres gueux pleins de bon aduētures  
Ne portent rien que des choses futures,*

the player in the right-hand corner has so small a head in proportion to his legs that the diameter of the calf is equal to the whole distance from the chin to the top of the skull,



which would be a monstrous deformity in the living human being, if ever such a misproportion occurred. Callot's excessive mannerism is obvious. Its chief peculiarity is the habit of reducing everything as much as possible to a peculiar kind of curve, rather like the curve of a goose quill and feather. If the reader will look at Callot's work with a view to this curve he will be surprised by the frequency of its occurrence. The chiaroscuro of his etchings and engravings ought not to be criticised on the same principles as if it were an attempt at complete chiaroscuro. It is a simple indication of the direction in which the light falls, no more. The texture of Callot's shaded surfaces is often not only imperfect, but positively offensive, especially when he made trellis-work with the burin, a plague to the eyes. He was one of the very worst draughtsmen of landscape who ever lived ; his trees are mere sausages, with tufts of grass for leaves ; but he drew buildings with a sense of the picturesque in architecture very rare in his own age, so that his records of them are interesting in the highest degree, and we only regret that they should be so few.

Boissieu is much more dangerous than Callot, on account of his uncommon skill in the very things that a young etcher is anxious to acquire. He could lay his tones with as near an approach to absolute certainty as any etcher need hope for ; and, in short, he was such a clever fellow that he could do with his hands whatsoever his mind imagined. But all this cleverness, though maintained by inexhaustible patience and untiring industry, led only to delicate renderings of distant tones, and a vulgarly deceptive imitation of nearer objects. Boissieu could etch a tub till it looked as if it had been photographed ; and he could etch a distant hill till it looked as soft and grey as a hill in an old picture ; but both tub and distance were always irremediably uninteresting as fine art. Boissieu was an extraordinary master of vulgar imitation, in which no etcher ever surpassed him ; and he



proved at least this, that there exists in etching a fund of imitative resource which may be drawn upon to an extent little dreamed of by people whose one idea about art is, that it is the imitative copyism of objects, and who hate etching because it is too interpretative for their taste. We shall come later to an imitator of a far higher order, Jules Jacquemart ; but even Boissieu had settled the question as to whether etching, in skilled hands, could or could not imitate things accurately.

CALLOT. *La Tour de Nesle*.—The Tour de Nesle is to the right, near the middle of the composition. Beyond it are the towers of Notre-Dame in the distance, the Pont Neuf, and several church steeples, besides blocks of houses. The foreground is animated by a variety of figures, some in boats, some on horseback, others on foot.

The distant view of Paris is beautiful, and the various distances are carefully preserved. There is some bad perspective, as in the tower itself, where the rings of masonry are wrong. A set of circles, seen in perspective, the circles being at various elevations above the spectator, offers just one of those little perspective problems which puzzle an artist who is not quite sure of himself. The figures have the usual intense vivacity of Callot's men and women—they are all alive and doing something ; this is a power akin to that of Cruikshank, who, by a similar energy in movement, has given life to figures so small that the faces are hardly visible. It is a sort of pantomime that fills this foreground from side to side ; every group is amusing, and a child might pass half-an-hour in inventing histories of the actors.

I need not expatiate on the great historical and topographical interest of this etching ; its value, as a record of Paris in Callot's time, is almost inestimable.

*The Louvre*.—Another view of the Seine, but this time looking down the stream, with the Tour de Nesle to the left,





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PLATE VII.

(To be placed opposite page 164.)

SCENE IN OLD PARIS, NEAR THE TOUR DE NESLE,  
by Callot.

*Copied by the Author.*

This is a very small portion of the large plate which was published in the first edition of this work. In the original the burin may have been a good deal used. In the copy it has not been used.

BITINGS.

heated to 90° Fahrenheit.								Minutes.
Distance and lightest touches on foreground	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	12
Middle distance	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	25
Darker parts of middle distance	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	35
Foreground	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	50

First proof taken.

Plate not retouched.

In printing, this plate has been first well wiped with canvas, and then lightly *retroussée* in the foreground and the house to the right, but the *retroussage* is strictly limited to these portions.



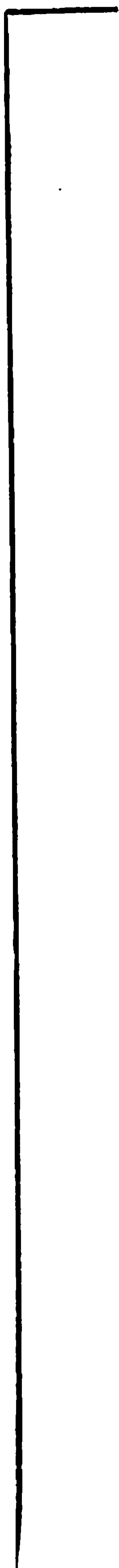
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seen from the other side. The water is crowded with high-sterned galleys, with masts and many oars. The sails are furled, the long pennons are powdered with fleurs de lis. It seems to be a royal procession by water; the quays are crowded with figures.

This is a good instance of the way Callot used to spoil his etchings, by employing engraver's methods of work. In the buildings to the left, the shading, which was at first perpendicular, has been ruined by a set of unmeaning diagonal lines, which produce a very unpleasant reticulation. There is a mechanical rigidity in the building which is contrary to the freedom of etching. The indications of cloud are weak and engraver-like; they have nothing of the quality of liberal and noble art. The group of buildings just behind the Tour de Nesle is in the highest degree picturesque—that is, we see that the buildings themselves must have been picturesque; but if they had only been reserved for Méryon, how much they would have gained in the delineation!

BOISSIEU. *Vue du pont et du château de Sainte Colombe, en Dauphiné.*—A battlemented and turreted castle to the right, with a mountain behind it. Under the castle are a mill and landing-stages; then a river with a bridge, and to the left of the bridge a massive tree; to the left of the tree a ruin, with arch beneath. In the foreground a landing-place, projecting from a stone pier to wooden supports, and near the landing-place a boat with large rudder, the boat containing barrels, etc. There are several figures—two men sitting on tiller, man and woman sitting on end of pier, woman and boy walking with a dog, man fishing, man standing leaning on his stick.

There is a considerable artistic craft. The distances are kept well, relatively. The foreground is vigorous, with a tendency to old-fashioned trifling here and there. The reflection of the boat is careful, the work on the boat tending to elaborateness, firm and good in light, but in



shadow needlessly black. The form of the mountain, as in all art of that time, is wanting in firmness and knowledge.

*Entrée du village de Lantilly.*—A pale delicate sky with some indication of cloud, a building to the right, with a square mass like a tower roofed in the low pyramid form, so often seen in southern countries. There is a staircase with a low gable. There is a large tree to the left, with the trunk partially denuded. The manual delicacy of the work in the sky is very admirable, but the imitative rendering of the tree-trunk is puerile, though skilful in a high degree. On the whole, this is one of Boissieu's best etchings.

*Les Tonneliers* (the large print).—Scene, the interior of a wine-cellar. *Personæ*, four men ; namely, a cooper striking circles with his hammer, two cellar-men carrying wine in a tub suspended on poles, a third standing and looking at the spectator, holding a pitcher on a barrel.

This etching is mentioned for the marvellous imitative finish in the barrel to the left—not to recommend it for imitation, but as a curious example of what may be accomplished in etching, in that direction, by an artist more skilful than intelligent.

*Vue du Passage du Garillano, en Italie.*—A pale sky, with a few clouds, chiefly to the right. A mountain, a city on a hill in the middle distance, an aqueduct to the right. A river with a ferry-boat ; in the boat a carriage and pair, a man on horseback, and several other people. In the foreground, to the left, a horse going to drink at a trough, a man with him, another man, a woman, two children, and a dog. In the right-hand corner is a man on horseback, galloping away.

This is a very perfect etching of its kind. The tone is most successfully reached everywhere. Many nobler etchers might be glad of this technical certainty in getting the tone just pale enough and just dark enough. It is a rare accomplishment, even amongst clever men.





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the great art public has very little in common. An intelligent writer upon art said, not very long ago, that artists had no occasion to complain of the public, because, if the matter were inquired into, it would be found that every artist had his own public. This is, no doubt, in a certain sense true; every writer and every artist is appreciated by somebody, if only he has some sort of talent and accomplishment; but for an author or an etcher to live by his work he needs more than this little group of friends. Three customers will keep a painter from starving for a year, but no composer of printed matter could live if he had only three readers. An etcher is a composer of printed matter, and he needs a public sufficiently large to remunerate him adequately for his time,—that is, at least two hundred regular buyers. Now, to find two hundred regular buyers, he requires ten times that number of students and admirers; and it is not always easy to excite the serious interest of two thousand people. A public which is not extensive enough to enable its favourite to live by his labour, is for all practical purposes not a public at all; and it is in vain to tell an author that he is unreasonable to wish for more than a hundred readers, or an etcher that he is foolishly anxious for notoriety when he is not satisfied with the approbation of the cultivated few. The suffrage of the cultivated few is very desirable, and there is more intellectual and artistic encouragement in the quiet praise of ten competent persons than in the applause of multitudes; but the very love of art itself compels an artist to wish for a public not only educated, but numerous; because, without either a numerous public or independent private fortune, he cannot continue to work. Méryon was sorely tried by public and national indifference, and in a moment of bitter discouragement he destroyed the most magnificent series of his plates. When we think of the scores of mediocre engravers of all kinds, who, without one ray of imagination, live decently and contentedly by their



trade, and then of this rare and sublime genius actually ploughing deep burin lines across his inspired work, because no man regarded it; and when we remember that this took place in Paris, in our enlightened nineteenth century, it makes us doubt whether, after all, we are much better than savages or barbarians. Now that plates can be preserved by steeling, the etchings of a man like Méryon would sell by tens of thousands if the world knew their value; but when such work as this is set before the vulgar public, it is like casting pearls before swine.

Méryon was born in Paris in 1821, the illegitimate son of an English father. Much of the unusual delicacy of perception which distinguished him as an artist, is attributed by M. Burty to maternal influence. He studied mathematics with much industry and application, and entered in 1837 the naval school of Brest. As a naval officer he visited many remote shores, sailing even round the world, and always employing his leisure hours in sketching everything of interest that came in his way. But, though Méryon loved the sea, and had a fraternal affection for sailors, his health was not robust enough for a life of that kind, and he was obliged to abandon his profession. Being already an intelligent practical amateur, he endeavoured to become an artist; and, with the intention of adopting painting as a profession, took lessons of M. Phellippes, a former pupil of David. As a painter, Méryon did not succeed, probably from anxiety to produce pictures without the necessary technical education. Whilst suffering from disappointment in this ambition, he happened to meet with M. Eugène Bléry, who directed his attention to etching. Méryon studied etching for several months with M. Bléry, and employed this time fruitfully in the analysis of plates by the elder masters, which he copied as exercises. This preliminary study was followed by excursions in Normandy and a visit to Bourges, a picturesque old city not very far south of the Loire.



Before undertaking the series of original etchings on which his fame will rest, Méryon laboriously employed the art in the translation of other men's work, or in the execution of more or less uncongenial commissions. What developed Méryon was his passionate wish to preserve some adequate memorial of that picturesque old city of Paris which has disappeared before the constructive activity of Haussmann and Louis Napoleon. If old Paris had been likely to remain a generation or two longer, it is possible that we might scarcely have heard of Méryon, because half the quality of his work is due to the intensity of his affection for remains whose destruction he foresaw with the most bitter regret, as a near and irremediable misfortune which he had no power to avert. But if an artist cannot save an old building which he loves, he may at least secure a memorial of it, a memorial better than the fidelity of the photograph, because it expresses not only the beauty of the thing itself, but the pathetic affection of the one human soul that cares for it. It became, then, the object of this artist to make a series of etchings in which the old *tourelles* and quaint streets of Paris should be preserved for future times, and when he undertook this task he had already made himself the most accomplished architectural etcher, not only of this century, but of all centuries ; not only of France, but of the world. The opportunity for the exercise of Imperial encouragement was exceptional and splendid ; and if the Government had known its duty, Méryon would have been commissioned to do perfectly, and on a far more extensive scale, what he did imperfectly in the face of absolute public indifference and the stern possibility of starvation.

So, without encouragement of any kind, this great artist patiently laboured, etching with the strangest and most novel union of sobriety of manner with depth of poetical feeling. He printed a few copies of his plates, and left them with different booksellers and dealers in engravings ;





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# PLATE VIII.

(To be placed opposite page 170)

## PALACE OF JUSTICE, AND BRIDGE, PARIS. part of a Plate by Méryon.

*Copied by the Author.*

### BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
Lightest touches in extreme distance . . . . .	3
Sky . . . . .	10
Distant building and paler ripples . . . . .	15
The remote pepper-box towers . . . . .	20
The nearer pepper-box towers . . . . .	25
Lighter parts under arches . . . . .	35
Darker parts under arches with building to the left, and farther boat	45
Nearest arch with nearest boat . . . . .	55

#### First proof taken.

The plate having been bitten as intended, there was nothing to be done except add a few lines which had been omitted. The plate was covered again with black ground, and these lines added and bitten thirty minutes in Dutch mordant.

#### Second proof taken.

A few fine lines added in sky and water with dry-point. A few burin lines inserted here and there under the bridges. The splay of the arches made visible by making the shade lighter with the burnisher.

Plate printed simply, being wiped with canvas only, and then very slightly *retroussée* in the foreground and dark arch to the left.



1875



1

2





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but the stream of life rolled past in its ceaseless flow, and paid as much attention to these jewels as the waves of the Mississippi give to some lost treasure on its banks. This neglect seems to have produced the first visible symptom of a mental malady, which clouded, with varying degrees of darkness, the remaining years of the unhappy artist's life. After living in the asylum at Charenton, where he continued in some measure the practice of his art so long as physical health remained, Méryon at length passed out of an existence made wretched by poverty, sickness, insanity, and by the apathy of an age unworthy of him. Méryon became subject to the hallucination that he was surrounded by crafty and secret enemies, who were constantly plotting against him.

As an etcher Méryon was remarkable for great certainty of hand combined with extraordinary caution. When at work from nature he stood, and without support of any kind, held both plate and mirror in one hand, laying the lines with the other, and so steadily that the most skilful etchers marvelled at his skill. No work ever done in the world has been more absolutely honest, more free from executive affectation or pride of method. He had great subtlety and delicacy of observation, and a perception of truth so clear, that it is strange how such bright insight can have been compatible with any cloud or malady of the mind. His work was sanity itself, by its perfect and equal acceptance of various facts, by its patience and steadiness in study, by its caution and moderation in manner. Thus, as I pointed out some years ago, Méryon was picturesque, but not narrowly and exclusively picturesque; for when a pure line occurred in a modern or Renaissance building, he gave it with marked attention to its especial quality of purity. It is, perhaps, to this very capacity for appreciating purity that a certain peculiarity of Méryon may be due, which has occasioned a doubt whether



he ought to be considered a great etcher, in the strict sense, or a great original engraver. He did not sketch so much or so freely as good etchers usually do, and there is a severity in his manner not always compatible with the ease of true etching. Nevertheless, I class him amongst true etchers on account of his frank use of the explanatory line, which is the chief test; added burin or dry-point work does not prove impotence with the etching-point, and is little more than a sort of glaze.

Considered psychologically, the work of Méryon is highly curious. It is thoughtful, reflective, intensely personal, and full of strange hints of a passionate fantasy, secret and subdued. This mental quality, far more than the manual dexterity of the artist, is the secret of his inexhaustible charm. He is a sort of enigma for us, which we are always trying to solve. Victor Hugo, with the clear eye of a poet, saw at once this mental fascination, and saw that Méryon needed to be strengthened by all possible encouragements in his great struggle with the Infinite—the infinite of Paris, the infinite of the sea. This was said in Victor Hugo's peculiar way—he can never write without some allusion to the Infinite or the ocean—but in this case the word was not inapplicable. Méryon was evidently an artist of vast and vague aspirations, though a dull critic might be prevented from seeing this by the unusual precision of his manner. Beyond the actual buildings which he drew, there are suggestions of long and lonely meditation on life and nature, on time and space, and the bewildering abysses of immensity.

*Le Stryge.*—At an angle of one of the towers of Notre-Dame there is a horned and winged demon who perpetually contemplates Paris, his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on a flat ledge of stone. He looks down the Seine towards the pavilions of the Tuileries, and his stony eyes





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destroys the impression of atmosphere ; though at a considerable distance, it is as dark as the nearest raven's wing, which cannot relieve itself against it. This *may* have been done in order to obtain a certain arrangement of black and white patches, but it seems unfortunate, and is certainly untrue. The tower of St.-Jacques is, however, very right and beautiful, and so is the curious distance over the roofs.

*La Pompe Notre-Dame.*—If the reader will refer to Turner's Rivers of France, he will find a subject called the "Hotel de Ville and Pont d'Arcole," in which the picturesque object that engaged Turner's attention and induced him to make the drawing is evidently a curious building in the middle of the river, and in the centre of the composition. This building consists of a tower and two wings, and it is entirely supported on a substructure of wooden scaffolding. This is the pump which has furnished a subject for Méryon. His remarkable precision of hand, and his usually wise moderation in light and shade, have never been better exemplified. Take, for example, the exquisitely gentle curvature in the three main lines of the tower, and the entire absence of exaggerated blackness throughout the whole plate. Many of the wall surfaces are in the shade, but it is shade illuminated by reflection. The intricate arrangement of the massive carpentry is expressed with evident enjoyment and a strong sense of construction.

*L'Abside de Notre-Dame de Paris.*—The tonality here is somewhat less accurate than in the plate just criticised, but the questionable passages are chiefly in the bridge and houses ; and the cathedral is a wonderful piece of work. There are, no doubt, many living engravers who could get quite safely through pieces of architecture not less elaborate, and many photographs have been taken from this very position, which, as copies of the building, are much more mechanically perfect. The value of work of this kind is due to an exquisite artistic sensitiveness, which has presented



the subject to us in such a way as to give it poetical interest.

*Tourelle, rue de la Tixeranderie, demolie en 1851.*—The general reader may feel interested in this plate on account of its subject, which is one of those picturesque corner-turrets that the Scottish architects borrowed from the French, and which give so much character to many an old tower north of the Tweed. This was one of the finest examples which had escaped destruction down to the middle of the present century, and its demolition coincided with the erection of the first Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. From the artistic point of view this *tourelle* was worth considerably more than Sir Joseph Paxton's enormous shed, but its disappearance was not thought an event of much importance, except by a few eccentric people, like Méryon, who do not always estimate things by a tariff of material values. Readers who intend to etch may find here much profitable study in the explanatory use of lines which constantly follow either the perspective of surfaces or the direction of shadows; and the plate has the additional advantage of showing, in a marked degree, how moderate and refined is Méryon's understanding of the picturesque. The stately turret and the free foliage of the vine about its base would have had charms for any sketcher, but Méryon alone could have seen the full artistic availability of the modern chimneys and roof, and the contrasting value of the ugly modern house to the left. The explanatory use of line has, in one point, been carried a little too far. There is an attempt to render the appearance of wood, by a somewhat puerile imitation of its grain. It may be observed also that Méryon's readiness to accept unpicturesque material has made him a little too tolerant, when he gives us the bit of wall in the foreground forming an acute-angled triangle of the most painfully mechanical sort.

*La Rue des Toiles, Bourges.*—It is not easy to procure the etchings of Méryon, which, for the most part, are out of



print, the plates having been destroyed ; but the " Rue des Toiles " was given by the etcher to a friend of his, and I hired the copper for the *Fine Arts Quarterly Review*, in which it appeared in January 1864. The subject is a picturesque mediæval street ; and though the etching is not so good as those mentioned above—for it has been over-bitten, and there is some confusion in the tonality—it gives, nevertheless, an idea of Méryon's qualities as a mediævalist. Victor Hugo is known to be one of his warmest admirers, and these quaint details have much in common with Hugo's picturesque descriptions.

*Le Pont Neuf*.—Early proofs of the latest state in which all the dry-point work is given, show Méryon quite at his best. The Pont Neuf is the most picturesque of existing Parisian bridges ; and however superfluous its projecting turrets may have seemed to the utilitarian mind, they were always delightful to artists. This plate has been engraved for no other purpose than to show two of these turrets to the very best possible advantage ; they are in full sunshine, whilst all the rest of the plate is either in subdued middle tint or sombre depths of shade. From the impenetrable gloom under the massive arches to the aerial delicacy of the distant street, there is the widest range of executive resource ; but whatever has been done either in massive arch, or flowing water, or many-storeyed houses, or clouded space of sky, has been done always in honour of these two turrets on the bridge. Even the third turret, that nearest us, has been sacrificed to them and cast into intentional shade ; and when Méryon comes to the rounding of the far-projecting cornice, where the gleam of sunshine falls, he follows every reflection with an indescribable pleasure and care. The wonder is that the delighted hand could work so firmly here, that it did not tremble with the eagerness of its emotion and fail at the very instant of fruition.





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The defect of too much system may be due in this instance, as it certainly was in that of Harding, to the habit of giving lessons. Few artists who give lessons escape from the temptation to invent and apply a definite method to everything, because such definite methods are the secret of apparent rapidity in teaching. If a great artist tried to make an amateur-pupil follow him in his searchings for unattempted expressions of unknown thoughts, if he himself became the "hierophant of an unapprehended inspiration," as Shelley said that poets are—and he included painters amongst poets—then the only consequence would be that the pupil would be left behind, alone in the pathless wilderness. A teacher who honestly tries to make his pupils learn something, endeavours to simplify art for them ; that is, he eliminates the vagaries of special research, and makes art as systematic as possible. In doing this he runs infinite risk of spoiling his own art, by abandoning all that he finds to be unteachable ; in other words, all that is rarest and best.

*Rue des Marmousets* (Vieux Paris).—A capital bit of street-sketching. In this street dwelt of old a pastry-cook, who, with the help of his neighbour the barber, murdered a man in the pastry-cook's house and made pies of him, which were highly appreciated by the public. "C'est de tems immémorial que le bruit a couru qu'il y avait en la cité de Paris, rue des Marmousets, un pâtissier meurtrier, lequel ayant occis en sa maison un homme, aydé à ce par un sien voisin barbier, faignant raser la barbe : de la chair d'icelui faisait des pasteuz qui se trouvoient meilleurs que les aultres, d'autant que la chair de l'homme est plus délicate, à cause de la nourriture, que celle des aultres animaux." In M. Lalanne's etching the lines of the old houses, curving slightly and leaning back from the street, are followed with much interest and enjoyment, and every accident in wall or window is made the most of.

*A Bordeaux*.—A view of the city of Bordeaux, which has



the honour of claiming Lalanne as one of its distinguished citizens. One of the least interesting of his plates. No doubt the cathedral spire and lofty tower with the scaffolding set up all round it are indicated with rare delicacy ; no doubt the line of houses along the quay is suggestive of much wealth and large population ; and the long bridge and the shipping are cleverly put in ; and the boat in the foreground serves, with its black mass, as a vigorous *repoussoir*. Nevertheless, the plate is dull, and its dulness is to be attributed, I imagine, to the impervious blocking-up of the view by that too long and regular line of houses that stretches entirely across it.

*Démolition pour le percement du Boulevard St.-Germain.*—Though the conventional black shadow crosses the foreground, there is great delicacy and truth in the tall tower-like scaffolding, the houses in the middle distance, and the beautiful dome of the Pantheon, visible beyond, like a mountain-crest pale and delicately outlined, seen beyond a middle distance of rugged cliffs and a foreground of scattered boulders.

*Démolition pour le percement de la Rue des Écoles.*—The foreground is dark again under the conventional black shadow, but a glancing side-light illuminates an irregular block of houses, bringing their picturesque projections into strong relief. To the left is a delicate, light spire, probably that of the Sainte-Chapelle, seen through haze, and executed like the cathedral of Bordeaux in the plate criticised above. This spire, and the distant bit of street under it, are full of mystery, and by their extreme delicacy of tint give great force to the intentionally rude work in the foreground. It is a fixed principle with Lalanne to draw near objects with heavy and open lines, and distant ones with light and close lines, keeping a regular gradation between the two of gradually increasing refinement, as the needle passes from the foreground. Like all good etchers, he is very particular in



making his lines *explanatory*; the direction of the shading in this foreground, always various, always carefully thought out, is an excellent instance.

*Vue prise du Pont St.-Michel*.—One of the most charming scenes which the improvements in Paris have opened out to us, and the most beautiful etching hitherto published by the French Club. The majestic domes of the new Louvre rise in their strange, accidental, unaccountable way above the long line of the great palaces of royalty and art; the Pont Neuf is just under them, all in shadow except its picturesque projections that catch the sunshine, and its graceful curve to the right, where it joins the brilliant quay. Soft reflections from the noble bridge fall undisturbed amongst the resting barges; and groups of trees whose artistic value the Parisian edile knows so well, stand by the noble river, having no more fear of the axe than if they sunned themselves on the loneliest shore of all her hundred leagues.

*Aux Environs de Paris*.—The foliage is very graceful and elegant, but the excessive love of waved lines in spray-drawing has led to some want of woody quality. It is the garden of one of those delightful habitations where the dainty taste of the Parisian architect has exercised itself in the free country, and where a rich man who is æsthetic enough to know the value of a beautiful dwelling may enjoy the possession of it in peace.

*A Neuilly, Seine*.—Notable for the same elegance as the preceding subject. The water is not sufficiently studied, but the foliage is beautiful.

*Paris. Vue prise du Pont de la Concorde*.—The largest etching by the artist, but by no means the best. The indication of distances is true as to tone, but neither the water nor the foliage is sufficiently studied. The water is not *level*, and there is an abuse of straight lines in the shading of the foliage. The plate is an attempt to introduce etching as a decoration for walls; this etching is intended for framing.





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that, since it is published, not as a work of art, but as an illustration of method, nobody will pay any attention to it.

*A Fribourg, Suisse.*—A portion of this etching is given here, and the reader will be able to gather from it all the essential peculiarities of Lalanne's method from the foreground to the distance. He will also at once recognise the ease and certainty of Lalanne's execution, qualities of the greatest importance in this open and frank kind of etching.



PLATE IX.

FRIBOURG, SWITZERLAND, by MAXIMÉ LAI ANNE

A portion of the original plate.



PLATE IX.

(To be placed opposite page 182.)

FRIBOURG, SWITZERLAND, by Maxime Lalanne

*A portion of the original plate.*

The following table of bitings is conjectural, as an accurate register was not kept at the time. It will be found, however, very nearly accurate, having been ascertained by experiment on another copper.

BITINGS.

Nitric acid and water in equal quantities. Bath (not artificially heated) 65° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
Extreme distance . . . . .	3
Distant towers, etc. . . . .	6
Street and distance to right . . . . .	10
Trees, fountain, and central house, with small kiosk, also upper buildings to left . . . . .	20
Deepest lines in foreground . . . . .	30

This plate has probably not been retouched. It was done from nature, and is a perfect example of Lalanne's manner in original sketching.

The nitric acid used is at forty degrees, which means that when the *pèse-acide* is set to float in the pure acid, the surface of the liquid will coincide with the fortieth degree on the register. This gives the degree of density of the acid.





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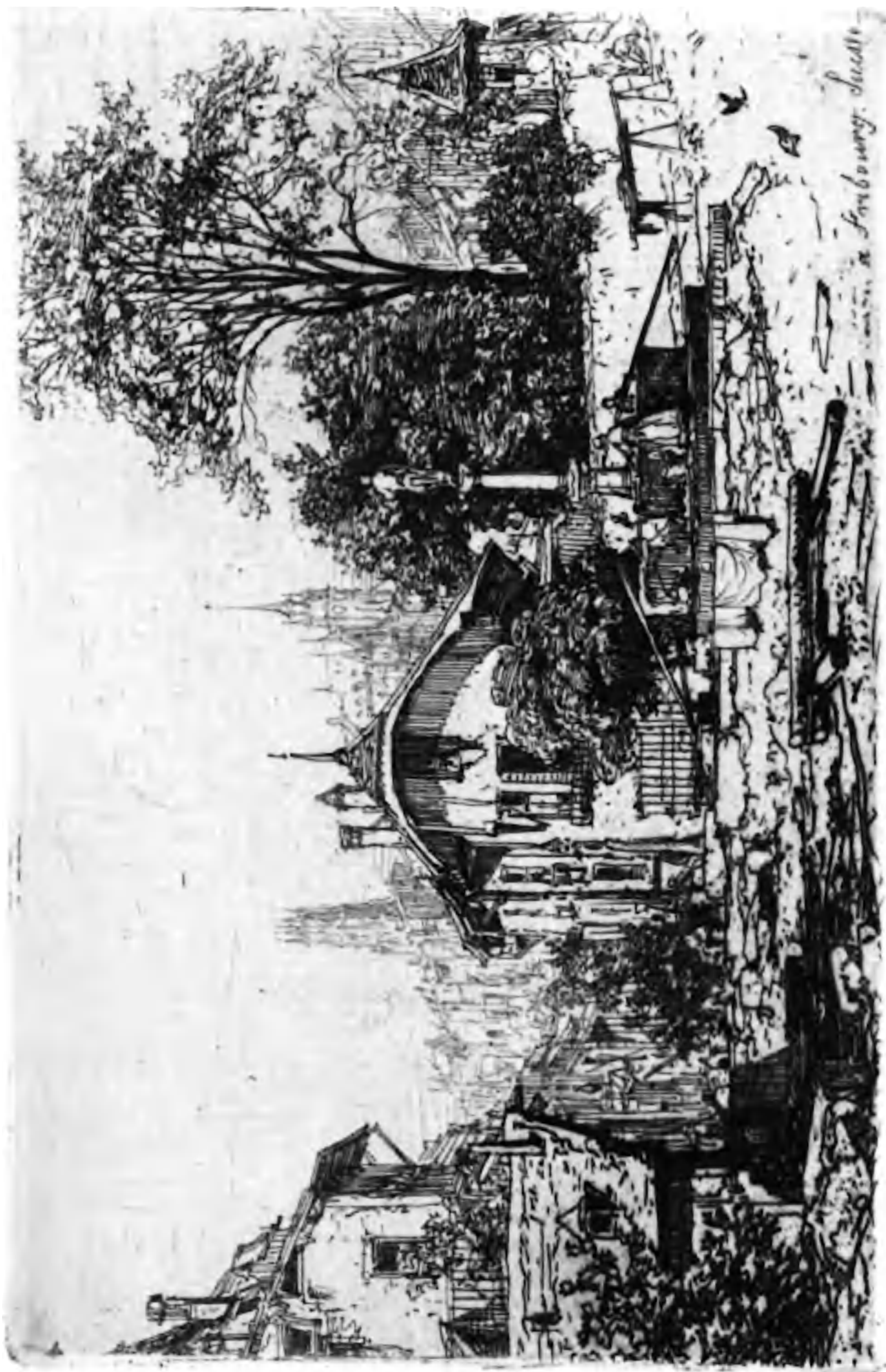
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A FINE VIEW OF THE HOUSE









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stones and metals till Jules Jacquemart taught me. The "Joyaux" of the Louvre were familiar to me, but a veil hung between me and their true splendour; and it was only when Jacquemart had etched them one by one that I learned to know them truly. An egg of crystal belonged to a fortune-telling gipsy; her eyes could see magic figures in its watery clearness which revealed to her the hidden mysteries of fate; often have others looked into it, but always without apprehending the secret things of destiny. So we have our precious gems and vases, and we never know their inner wonder and significance till there comes a genius like Jacquemart, when suddenly the scales fall from our eyes, and for the first time in our lives *we see!* So true is this that the study of Jacquemart's etchings has definitely increased my enjoyment of common objects, such as plate and crystal on a dinner-table, and the veinings of marble, and the transparencies of jewels; I apprehend subtle lustres and reflections in these things which were once imperceptible to me, and I know that the difference is due to the etchings of Jules Jacquemart—I know this as positively as a man who has been successfully operated for cataract knows to what surgeon he owes the recovery of his sight.

Jacquemart has etched some landscapes and views of cities which show no sign of remarkable artistic powers. He has also published a work on book-binding, giving soft-ground etchings of many old designs, all executed in the prosiest possible way, and as unlike what he does now as the ugly duckling to the swan. His portraits are sometimes clever, and his compositions of flowers still more so, but it is conceivable that another man might attain the degree of skill shown in these etchings. When Jacquemart illustrated porcelain for a work of his father, "*Histoire de la Porcelaine*," he began to be inimitable; and when he was commissioned by M. Barbier de Jouy to illustrate the jewels of the Louvre, he stood at last on his own ground, master of his subject,



master of his means, safe from all human rivalry, a prince in a little fairy principedom of his own, full of enchanted treasures, full of gold and opal and pearls, of porphyry and sardonyx and agate, of jasper and lapis lazuli, all in the deepest and truest sense his own; for what rich man ever so truly possessed these things?

*Histoire de la Porcelaine* (plate 6).—The etching represents a Chinese dinner-plate and two cups. Jacquemart's principle of imitation has evidently been to give the greatest importance to local colour, and to admit only just so much effect as may be necessary to indicate the form of the object. There is effect, however, though often infinitely subtle, in every etching in the work; one side of an object is always more strongly lighted than the other side, and the light in its passage reveals, by hints of ineffable delicacy, the projections and hollows of the porcelain. The relation of local colour to chiaroscuro is here strictly that aimed at by Paul Veronese, and is precisely the one best fitted for the representation of painted ware. There are two personages; a lady in her garden, and her lover scaling the wall; both have black hair, which, in each case, occurs on a part of the plate which is in full light, but Jacquemart takes no notice of this, and makes the hair as black as he possibly can. This is justifiable because both heads are surrounded by perfectly white porcelain, which by contrast would make the hair strike us as two patches of absolute black, even in full light.

*Histoire de la Porcelaine* (plates 14 and 15).—Especially marvellous for the imitation of texture and surfaces. If the reader will observe the way in which Jacquemart has imitated the *craquelé* and the *soufflé* in the two vases of plate 14, and the lower part of the tea-pot in plate 15, and then study the rich colouring of the upper part of the same tea-pot, he will agree with me that when etchers fail to render texture, it is either because they disdain it, or because they have not



mastered the art, and not from any defect inherent in the nature of the process.

*Huit Études et Compositions de Fleurs.*—It is not necessary to offer special criticism of any of these compositions, but I may direct attention to qualities which are common to all of them. The true nature of the petals of a flower has never, to my knowledge, been so well expressed in art. The petal of a flower, considered simply as tissue, is quite unlike anything we are accustomed to manufacture. It is never of the same thickness throughout, it is never precisely of the same shade, it bulges and curls, and softly droops and falls till its surfaces are presented to the light in a thousand unimaginable ways. Alone amongst draughtsmen, Jacquemart has fully comprehended this; and as his hand, better than any other human hand, has rendered the hardness of porphyry and the inflexible fragility of porcelain, so also it has most truly interpreted the tender shades and complex delicate lines on which depend the untidiness of the poppy, and the beauty of the rose.

*Gemmes et Joyaux de la Couronne : Plate 2, Vase antique de Sardoine.*—There is nothing in the form of this vase to merit the labour of Jacquemart, for it resembles a common pitcher; but as the material was dark and very highly polished, the whole object is covered with various reflections, which are imitated with a degree of force and audacity extremely rare amongst copyists of such things as this. Jacquemart had a studio in the Louvre, and there the precious vases were brought to him; they stood upon his table till he had done with them, and the table was near to a window. This window is reflected over and over again on the polished surface of the stone, and the reader may observe how much of the brilliancy of the etching depends upon the contrast between the white sky in the window-panes and the black shades where they are not reflected. He may also perceive the utility of the straight lines of the window-frames, which





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*Gemmes et Foyaux*: Plate 23, *Drageoir de Cristal de Roche*.—Here is the same perspective difficulty in the drawing of the rim, in still greater complexity. There is a fine *flow* in the lines, in the raised centre of the cup, like the lines that the reins take when a man drives many horses abreast. After etching a bright transparent thing like this, with such beautiful and elaborate curves, Jacquemart could etch a wave, if only it would stay for him; but the condition of consummate imitative work is always that the subject must stay to be studied.

*Gemmes et Foyaux*: Plate 28, *Salière de Lapis Lazuli*.—There is so much local colour here that when once we have been told the material, we see it as if it had been painted, with all its depths of azure, and glittering faults of pyrites. The methods of work adopted here are entirely different from those used in the preceding subject, for Jacquemart is so versatile, and adapts his art so readily to the imitation of various materials, that every new kind of matter exacts from him the invention of new arrangements of line

*Gemmes et Foyaux*: Plate 30, *Coupe de Jaspe oriental*.—There is a little group at one end of this cup, Neptune and Amphitrite, which may be taken as a more than commonly severe test of Jacquemart's power of drawing. It is very beautiful; even the hands, notwithstanding their minuteness, are given with perfect accuracy. Observe the lightness of the pale golden trident, and its contrast with the rich dark of the jasper.\*

\* In this portion of the work I adhere to my first plan of describing original etchings only, but the reader will find in the present edition a section on etching from pictures which includes an estimate of Jacquemart's labours in that kind.



## CHAPTER VII.

### *CHARLES JACQUE.*

**R**EADERS who wish to know more about Charles jacque and his labours than I have space for here, are recommended to procure M. Guiffrey's "Catalogue of Jacque's etchings," which was published in 1866 by Mdlle. Lemaire, 110 Boulevard de Magenta, Paris.

Charles Jacque was born in Paris in 1813. At the age of seventeen he was placed with a geographical engraver, but did not like the work, and enlisted as a soldier. His military career lasted seven years, during which he was present at the siege of Antwerp. After his return to the life of a civilian, Jacque spent two years in England, where he worked as a draughtsman on wood; and these seem to have been his only absences from France. He had relations in Burgundy, and during his visits to these relations he found the material for many of his best etchings. Burgundy is a very good country for an etcher; the rustic life is more than usually picturesque, and there are plenty of old buildings and bits of good landscape. The true French picturesque is seldom seen in greater perfection than in Burgundy; it exists there in the most profuse abundance, but in odd places where no one but an artist would know how to discover it. Jacque had the right instinct for material of this kind, and made good use of it, as many an etching of his still testifies. His farmyards and scenes of rustic life are most of them reminiscences of this region, and to me—who have lived in Burgundy for years—they have a familiar



air, a look of home, which proves that they render not only the details of local truth, but the spirit of the land.

Charles Jacque is a painter, and a constant contributor to the *Salon*. I dislike his paintings for their false and unpleasant colour, but he knows sheep and poultry well, and is a master of rustic life. His skill in drawing poultry may be partly accounted for by the fact that he is himself a distinguished fancier and breeder.

Of his quality as an etcher it is not easy to speak briefly. Some of his works are manly, others effeminate; some are imitative, others in a high degree interpretative; some are rapid and intuitive, others slow and painfully laborious. The total result is that he will certainly be remembered as one of the master etchers of our time. He has etched more than four hundred plates, and out of these hundreds a selection might be made which, in its way, would bear a comparison with much of the most famous work of past centuries.

Charles Jacque can work, when in the humour, in as genuine a way as any master whatever, but he is subject to a hankering after dainties in execution, which are not wholesome, artistic pastry and sweets, which a masculine appetite ought not to desire. He draws very admirably when the subject of his drawing is one that he has a great affection for; I have noticed, for instance, that in his farmyards the utensils are drawn with a degree of truth and precision very unusual in art, and no man ever drew poultry better. He does not really draw trees, however, though he conveys the sentiment of landscape. His deep and sincere love of simple country-life gives a great charm to many of his etchings, and is entirely conveyed to the spectator. A sentiment of this kind escapes analysis, but communicates itself in a wonderful ineffable way. No artist ever had the sentiment of *rusticity* in a purer form than Jacque. This is quite a different feeling from the great passion for landscape,





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than the grass in the foreground, which is represented by a few open and careless strokes.

*Une Ferme* (Guiffrey, 189).—The farm has two gables and a thatched roof beyond. There are two walls, one to the left coming near to the spectator, and above which are seen the trees of an orchard whose branches overhang and cast shadows down it. The other wall is at right angles to the line of building, and in the shade; beyond it rise lofty trees. A flock of sheep, in a state of much hurry and excitement, are driven by a shepherd and his dog in a direction away from the spectator; amongst the sheep are two cows, and a third cow is driven by another man along the shaded wall. In the immediate foreground are a cock and four hens on a dunghill.

This is one of the finest of Charles Jacque's farms; in some of them the finish is pushed unnecessarily far, but the work here is serious and manly. The texture of the long wall with the gables is as good as Decamps', and the colouring of the roofs and of the dark tree masses is boldly right and true. The action of the crowding sheep is given with perfect vivacity. There is an apparent rudeness in the open shading of the sky which pleases me by its frank avowal that, although a rough wall may be translated imitatively as to texture, sky and cloud cannot be. Painters have a superstition that every subject needs an escape into the remote distance, and nine men out of ten would have knocked down the wall to the right and given us, in place of it, a league or two of landscape. Charles Jacque has acted much more wisely; he needed the inclosure as a characteristic of farm-precincts, and as an element in the expression of homeliness.

*Petits, petits!* (Guiffrey, 187).—A boy is seated on a board, which rests upon two barrels, and a little girl leans upon the same board near him. The boy is feeding poultry.

If this etching had appeared in one of the best publications of the English Club, it would have borne comparison,



as a specimen of essentially modern finish, with the best work of Hook or Frederick Tayler; and although the Germans have made laborious attempts in the same direction, they have not yet surpassed such work as this. I feel, however, with regard to this plate, and others of a like quality by the same master, the same sense of approval, under protest, which I have already expressed in speaking of Boissieu and others. The subject is charming, the composition admirable, and the execution skilful beyond praise; but this is not the kind of skill that a noble etcher ought to care for and aim at. These *tours de force* in soft shading, like chalk spread with the stump; these little specks of reserved light, like touches of white on a lithograph; these pretty bits of accurate imitation on hoops of barrel and plumage of bird, however dexterous and inimitable in their way, are scarcely worth the toil they cost.

If we think of this simply as a picture, our criticism is disarmed, and we can but do homage to its sweetness and truth. There is poetry in the very title, *Petits, petits!* The children are not artist's models, but real country-children feeding their favourites, as it seems to us, in some quiet corner where no one sees them. It is an hour of happy idleness; the simple meal is ended, but one morsel of bread remains which these grateful fowls may share.

*L'Hiver* (Guiffrey, 195).—In the middle of the foreground a youth is seated with a stick between his legs; he turns his head to look at a girl who is driving two cows. He himself has the charge of eleven pigs. To the right is part of a pool of water, and above the swineherd the border of a wood. The etching is signed in the right-hand corner, "Ch. Jacque, 1864." There is a want of brilliancy in this etching amounting almost to dulness. The figure of the swineherd is easy and natural, but it is the only really good thing in the plate. There are many trunks of trees which are neither scientific nor imaginative. The subject is agreeably arranged,



but feebly executed. It is pretty, and only pretty—a criticism which equally applies to several other works by the same artist.

*Le Labourage* (Guiffrey, 182).—A man ploughing with a pair of horses. The horses are drawn with great truth, and all the details about the harness and plough are rendered with careful fidelity. The figure of the man is less successful, and the landscape is somewhat meagre and poor. A more powerful landscape-painter would have drawn the dark earth, as it turns over and falls from the ploughshare, with far greater force than this. The earth here looks as much like spread hay as the cloven soil.





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might he not, by perseverance, have drawn better without missing artistic unity? I believe not; I believe that any attempt to preserve such drawing as is popularly considered good, would have nullified his whole work, whilst the far more arduous ambition of thoroughly good draughtsmanship would have turned his efforts into quite a different channel; so that the Daubigny whom we know would have had no artistic existence. There are many varieties of bad drawing: there is Daubigny's, which is perfectly honest, and never sets itself up for more than it is,—nay, which is willing to pass, and does constantly pass, for even less than it is; and there is the laborious and pretentious bad drawing, which is popularly considered very good, and which always escapes censure, except from true students. Take, for instance, a cow, by some popular cattle-painter, with every bone in its body out of place, and every joint so constructed that an animal built in that fashion could never walk; these defects will not attract notice if only there is a certain appearance of precision, a certain sharpness of touch, and neat brushwork on a carefully imitated surface. A cow by Daubigny is not in reality more badly drawn, but then everybody sees its shapelessness at the first glance, because Daubigny has none of the tricks of the painter who works for the market, and in the simplicity of a noble artist-nature scorns the little artifices by which ignorance is concealed. The one thing that he aims at he secures: he aims at unity, and he secures unity. This unity of aspect is in reality intimately associated with unities of sentiment and thought, and springs from them. Daubigny does not think much, or feel much, about the cow and the branch: it is the whole landscape which charms and attracts him; and in his actual work his attention never quits the picture to apply itself to this or that portion of his materials.

The rough, and apparently “unfinished,” etchings of Daubigny may seem easy to the inexperienced, and a certain



proportion of them are, no doubt, failures, even if considered strictly from the artist's point of view. But if the reader will study those mentioned below, and then attempt to do free work in the same sense, and with the same directness and simplicity of intention and method, he will find the task more arduous than it perhaps appears. The difficulty of this simple and straightforward etching consists in its very simplicity and straightforwardness. When a plate has evidently been tormented and mended till it came into shape, there is some hope that by labour and correction we may arrive at a like result ; but when these means are forbidden to us by the very nature of the thing to be imitated, the difficulty is greatly increased. What Daubigny does, as an etcher, may not seem at first sight very astonishing, but he expresses himself, and he expresses himself at once. It is like apt and ready oratory, of which the excellence lies quite as much in promptitude as in power.

All this may be said without endorsing the weakest and most trifling etchings of Daubigny. There are several plates, for instance, in the "*Voyage en Bateau*," which are too trifling to be criticised, and in which the facetiousness of the artist has led to a momentary forgetfulness of art.

*Voyage en Bateau: le Déjeuner à l'Auberge*.—Five men are seated at table on rush-bottomed stools, and under a vine ; they are drinking coffee and smoking pipes after *déjeuner*. (The first plate of the series, and one of the best.) As a simple sketch on the copper, this may be taken as a model for honesty and simplicity of workmanship. The foliage of the vine is not very good, considered separately as foliage, but it takes its place well in the composition. The etching holds well together, and the relations of tone are unexceptionable. Observe the rapid indication of the vine shadow on the wall, in free open lines running in the right direction. The figures are true landscape-painter's figures, and drawn without pretension.



*Voyage en Bateau: la Recherche de l'Auberge.*—Two figures, one holding a lantern, are seeking their way in a dark night. The cabin of the boat is just visible low down to the left, and there are some dark houses to the right. The sky is cloudy, but there is subdued light in two grey spaces behind the formless clouds. This is very genuine and perfect work of its kind, and there are some very fine passages. The various lights and darks immediately above the lantern, and especially the obscurity near the cover of it, are amongst the finest.

*Voyage en Bateau: Daubigny travaillant dans sa Cabine.*—One of the most interesting, as well as one of the best, of the series. A gleam of sunshine lights the canvas on which Daubigny is working, and one or two other canvases which are leaned against the wall of the cabin. The rest of the plate is either in shadow or more or less illuminated by reflection. The lighting is true and good, and the use of the etched line everywhere frank and right. The reader may amuse himself by enumerating the contents of Daubigny's little floating studio. They are not luxurious, and the only signs of self-indulgence are a rather extravagant supply of onions and short pipes, and a coffee-pot. There are also a gridiron and a frying-pan, and three wine-bottles. These, with bare shelter and the bed that is turned up in the corner, are ample materials for happiness, if only those canvases get on prosperously. Better a little cabin like this, with the satisfaction of doing good work, than the most splendid studio in Paris, with an inward conviction of incapacity. I would rather be Daubigny here, and cook my own dinner and make my own bed, than be a certain Commander of the Legion of Honour whom I could name, who, in his palace of the Champs-Élysées, is compelled by the devil to paint, year after year, with the clear knowledge that he is a charlatan.

*Voyage en Bateau: la Nuit sur la Rivière.*—The boat





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solemn and sad feeling. The execution is frank and apparently coarse.

*Le Gué.*—Twelve cows are just going to cross a broad river with a herd-boy behind them. A large tree extends its branches over the water. The opposite shore is bare and uninteresting.

An etching of this kind is not to be criticised bit by bit ; its one merit is a certain largeness of aspect. Referring the reader to the earlier chapters of this book for fuller commentary on these qualities, I may say here that the plate before us is valuable for its frankness and comprehensiveness, not for any accuracy or beauty of design. The cows are all out of drawing, the branches are ungraceful, the foliage is ugly, the sky is coarse, and the distance poor ; yet, in spite of all these faults, the etching is not only a fine one, but one of the finest executed in this century. Directness of intention and amplitude of aspect are perfectly compatible with the most obvious imperfections in parts.

*Les Vendanges* (this is Plate 161 in the publication of the *Société des Aquafortistes*).—It is quite a remarkable instance of Daubigny's obtuseness and inaccuracy as a draughtsman. The oxen are no more like oxen than sacks of flour, except that they are decorated with horns. The wheels of the *char* resemble nothing so much as very broad-brimmed straw hats balancing themselves miraculously on the edge of their brims. All the beauty of the vine leafage is neglected, and the figures of the *vignerons* are no better than the oxen. There are hills in the distance and clouds in the sky, but both hills and clouds are formless. And still I keep this etching, and value it, because it is a perfect harmony both in sentiment and in tone, one of the most absolutely harmonious plates I know. The least bit of accurate drawing, or of what engravers call "finish," in any one detail, would have ruined the whole work unless it could have been



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carried out over the entire extent of it.\* It is not to be supposed that Daubigny is quite unable to draw a cart-wheel or a cow's horn ; and when he drew these in this apparently puerile way, we may rely upon it that he knew what he was about. The purpose of this etching has been a certain unity of aspect, which has been purchased by the sacrifice of many truths which another artist might have been unwilling to surrender.

\* And even if such finish *had* been carried out over the whole extent of the etching, there would have been a definite loss to set against the gain. We should not have had what we have now, but another thing altogether, not an improvement, but a substitution.



## CHAPTER IX.

### *APPIAN.*

**M**Y admiration for Appian's work as an etcher (he is a charming painter also) was already great several years ago, but the more I see how rare his qualities are in contemporary art, or in any art, the more I feel disposed to value them. His work is always quite easy and graceful in manner, never strained, never betraying an effort, and it hardly ever fails to charm by a most delicate feeling for the poetry of natural landscape. The lightness, or the apparent lightness, of his hand is such that the wonder is how the point can remove the ground sufficiently to ensure regularity of biting; were he sketching with a silver point on unglazed porcelain the touch could hardly be more ærial. Although in etching a real equality of pressure is an unfortunate necessity, the proof ought to produce the illusion that the etcher has played *piano* or *forte* just as he pleased, and in the best of Appian's etchings this illusion is complete. Another good quality in his work is that each plate, however large or however small it may be, is conceived from the first as a whole, and the first conception is never departed from for the disproportionate realisation of some obtrusive detail. It would be easy to criticise little bits of his work by taking them separately, easy to say that he does not draw a leaf or a blade of grass, a kind of criticism the more specious that it affects to proceed from a superior accuracy of knowledge; but the answer is that Appian sees always in masses, and gives quite as much detail as is consistent with the preserva-





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a deep pool. In the right centre of the composition is a bridge with two arches, and to the left there are great overhanging masses of rock which cast broad shadows.

This is a very fine study of rocks and little else. The figure and net are beautifully introduced, and both water and sky are well treated, but not important, except as quiet spaces with a little variety in them. The beetling masses of rock, with their vast shadows, are everything in the picture, and are studied with much thoroughness, fractures and all. Rocks are not generally a very *grateful* subject of study. They stand still to be drawn, which is something, and they afford fine shadows, but it is always extremely difficult to make them interesting. The interest of this rocky river-bank lies in the fact that the huge stony masses overhang and seem to threaten.

2. A plate about the same size as the preceding. It is a study of a more open stream with small rocks. The rising bank to the left is covered with copsewood, out of which rise two young trees (oaks apparently, at least the nearer one) almost entirely denuded of their leaves. In the distance is a rising land, with two cottages to the right. There are clouds in the sky. In the foreground are ducks and a drake flapping his wings.

This is one of the most masterly of Appian's etchings in execution, and so harmonious in tone that I conclude it must have been done from one of the artist's pictures. The sky and distance are delightful in quality, the sky apparently sketched in dry point, and the bur removed. The distance, which is bitten, has almost the softness of oil. The foreground of course is much more strongly accented, with black shades here and there. The reader may observe with advantage the art with which the water is shaded, its lightest space being small and very central, and the skilful management of what is intended to be distinct and what is intended to be confused. The drake, for instance, and the tree to the left



are distinct things amidst a good deal of delightful mystery and confusion, and both are very beautifully drawn.

3. *Souvenir*.—Easily recognised by a windmill in the middle. To the right of this is a sailing boat, to the left another windmill. On a rocky bank to the right is a building with a low tower, like a remnant of feudal times. All this material is reflected in calm water.

Nothing is more difficult than the treatment of the sky in etching, and the best way generally is to leave the open sky quite blank, preserving thus its serenity at the expense of its gradation. If any shading is attempted it must not be mechanical, which would be fatal to the harmony of the plate. In the present instance the sky is shaded in fine taste with strokes, generally horizontal in tendency, but never stiffly horizontal. As the sky is lightly bitten the effect is good.

4. *Au Valromey (Ain)*.—A little stream, with rocks and trees, and the slope of a rocky hill.

Some of the shadows here are overbitten, especially one to the left, which is far too black. The quality of the foliage, wayward sprays and branches, rocky ground and sky, is delightful.

5. A very small plate, the engraved portion measuring  $4\frac{3}{8}$  inches by  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches. The subject is a country path or wild road, with a single figure coming towards the spectator. Behind the figure is a group of poplars and other trees, lower and more massive. To the right is a rising ground ; to the left a pond, with land rising behind it. The sky is lightly shaded, and a few clouds are sketched near the horizon. The signature is in the upper left-hand corner, with the date 1865.

This little etching is one of the best examples of Appian's charming way of treating what is generally thought commonplace and uninteresting scenery. Out of the undulations of a country which is only just not perfectly level, with a few



poplars and a pond, he makes a little gem of landscape, to be treasured and remembered.

7. *Une Mare. Environs de Rossillon*.—One end of a solitary pool of water in rough ground. A stork is standing by the pool, and there are wild stems and branches in the upper part of the composition, which is an upright one. In the left-hand upper corner is the signature of the artist, with the date 1867.

This has always seemed to me the most exquisite piece of free branch and stem drawing in the whole range of French etching. It is this, and much more than this; for not only are the trees full of an inexpressible waywardness and grace, but the whole work—the bit of rocky bank, the little inlet of calm water, the sweet distance, and the delicate sky; all this material forms a perfect harmony, presented to us with the true passion of a tender and sensitive artist. No one but an artist can know how much this little place must have been loved before it could be etched so.

8. *Marais de la Burbanche (Ain)*.—In the middle of the composition is a rock or big boulder-stone, with smaller stones to the right, and similar ones in the distance. Near the central one is some light foliage. To the left the ground rises suddenly in a steep bank. There is water in the foreground resembling a calm pool in a stream, and by the water are three storks. The sky is lightly clouded, and in the left-hand upper corner is the date 1868 after the artist's signature. The general effect is that of a calm evening.

One of the loveliest and most perfect bits of quiet landscape of a melancholy kind I ever met with. Nothing can be more harmonious than this etching, it affects the mind like music.

9. *Un Soir Bord du Rhone à Rix (Ain)*.—One bank of the Rhone only is seen, with hills beyond, which are reflected in the calm water. A boat is just coming to land with





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## CHAPTER X.

### *CHIFFLART.*

**I**N the first edition of this book Chiffart was not studied in a separate chapter, but had only a paragraph amongst minor etchers. A more extended notice appears to be due to him, because his plates are, at the same time, very original in conception, and very pure examples of a particular kind of technical work in etching. He is far indeed from being faultless, and is not at all what a severe and prudent critic would recommend as a "safe man," but with all his errors he has really something to express, and expresses it with the utmost directness. Suppose a man of active and wild imagination, who sits down with a large copper before him, waits a little till a scene or an action presents itself to the inward eye, and then sketches it as quickly as possible on the copper itself without any intermediate memoranda, before the imaginative conception has lost anything of its vividness. This is Chiffart's manner of working, at least in the plates I intend to speak of here ; and now let me say something that needs to be said about the way in which criticism ought to deal with work that is so produced. It would be most unjust to require from it the qualities which belong to thoughtful and painstaking labour, which gives days or weeks to the elimination of its own errors. The model is not called in that the artist may correct the mistakes of his memory and imagination by a reference to nature, nor does he finish his shading any more perfectly than his design, for if he did there would be one of those executive contradictions which



destroy the harmony of art. If one of these hurried improvisations, in which the forms are all confessedly imperfect, were to be shaded as Le Rat would shade a finished head after Bellini, the result would be unendurable. Chiffart is far too completely the artist to tolerate the slightest approach to false finish\* of any kind; therefore, when he improvises, he shades just as he draws, hewing out the forms by means of shadow, but no more. The drawing is everywhere inaccurate, yet not more inaccurate than the drawing in the hasty sketches of the great masters. That of Rembrandt is often equally imperfect, that of Michael Angelo occasionally. Michael Angelo's rough sketch of the "Fall of Phaeton" is even more shapeless, especially in the animals (which have puddings for bodies, with impossibly small heads and legs all out of proportion), than the worst of Chiffart's sketches.

1. *Surprise*.—Six horsemen surprised by lionesses. The men are naked, but armed with spear and bow. One horse and man are down, under the feet of the others. A lioness has seized the man on the nearest horse, whose companion is attempting his deliverance. His horse, in turn, is attacked by another lioness, which two riders are going to spear. An archer on horseback is aiming at a lioness bounding through the air.

Grandly composed and full of movement. The energy of the action will seem over-strained to a cool spectator who does not realise the scene; and everything is indeed over-accentuated in the drawing, but it is grand genuine work, full

\* What I mean by false finish is a superficial finish applied to anything which has not yet been prepared to receive it. It would be false finish to polish a statue before it had been hewn into the proper shape. It is false finish in painting to attend to surface before you have got things into their places. It is false finish in education to advance to subtle and delicate distinctions before broader and simpler ones have been fully apprehended. In the work of mechanics the file precedes emery paper, and a coarse file precedes a fine one. The only finish which is worth anything is that which comes when everything has been prepared for it; ~~then~~ it is well worth having, if rightly applied, both in etching and other arts.



of right abstraction, and so honest that the most glaring mistakes have been corrected without effacing, the consequence being that a man's wrist is in two positions at once, and one lioness has four ears. Men and animals are full of expression. The nearest horse is mad with fear, the men are full of valour, the wild beasts eager, agile, ferocious.

2. *Un Jour de Récompense*.—A classical distribution of rewards, seen from a grotesque point of view. A struggling crowd is fighting its way up to the temple of Fame, where a radiant priestess is holding out laurel crowns, whilst trumpeters blow their trumpets. Raised high above the contending crowd, laurelled, white-robed, and holding palms in their hands, sit the few who have been successful. The unsuccessful are either elbowing and crushing each other, or else abandoning the contest with vacant or dejected faces.

This is so sketchy that you can hardly make the figures out, but it is full of grim humour. The faces of the stupid bloated man, and the thin, peevish, disappointed man, who have abandoned the contest, are both capital.

3. *The Sarcophagus*.—A classic sarcophagus in a grove, with a meagre, sad-faced man seated and leaning upon it; another behind showing his naked shoulders; and a third on the sarcophagus itself; this last perhaps supposed to be carved in marble.

The seated figure is very finely conceived, and the whole composition is powerful. The shoulder-blade of the man behind is unpleasantly salient, but the thinness of the seated figure is not without grandeur. The plate is simply and powerfully bitten.

4. *Plutus*.—A hideous figure is scattering coins from a horn of plenty. I think this is not Plutus, but only his minister; the god must be the personage lightly outlined in the upper sky, who holds a scourge in his right hand with extended arm. Men are praying and fighting for the coins; one is stabbing another; strong men are wrestling on the





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## CHAPTER XI.

### *LALAUZE, VEYRASSAT, MARTIAL.*

**M.** ADOLPHE LALAUZE is one of the most skilful original etchers in the modern French school, but he has not yet produced very much. The best of his works are a little series of ten plates entitled *Le Petit Monde*, representing the occupations and amusements of children. We learn from a preface by M. Montrosier that the artist's own children were the models from which he drew, so that he worked with a double affection, the artistic and the paternal in one. The result is very charming, the little incidents are really such as occur in child-life, and they are presented with the most accomplished skill. There are two little girls and a baby, besides a doll and a dog. The incidents all take place at home, in a pretty French *appartement* with polished inlaid floors and tasteful furniture, which is all lovingly studied as so much still-life, though in due subordination to the figures. Most of the little groups are prettily composed, and one or two quite beautifully. Amongst the incidents are such subjects as the "Drawing Lesson," the "Music Lesson" (in which we see nobody but the two little girls, studying as earnestly as possible), "Baby's Soup" (an administration of soup to the young gentleman), "Baby is very good" (in which baby is in his cot, and one of his sisters amuses him with a bunch of currants, whilst the other plays on the *mirliton*). All these plates are treated with the most perfect technical mastery, combining great ease of manner with a brilliant truth of both texture and tone. The last-named plate especially is a fine



one, beautifully composed, and full of surpassingly good qualities in execution. It would be a great mistake to suppose that because the subjects of this little collection are taken from the nursery, whilst the plates themselves are popular with children, they are unworthy of serious criticism. On the contrary, the artist has done his best with them, and made them works of art in the higher sense.

Veyrassat's labours as an etcher may be divided into two parts—his copies from pictures, and his original designs on copper. The latter alone concern us in this place. He has etched a few rather large plates, such as "Le Bac" (the ferry-boat), which are skilful and manly in workmanship; but by far the most delightful of all Veyrassat's etchings are the little ones. There are ten or a dozen of them which I would willingly have described in detail, were it not that they are all executed upon precisely the same principles, and are really the same etching in different forms; I mean that the artistic problem to be resolved is the same in the different little plates. It will be enough, therefore, to explain what the problem is, and to show how the artist has overcome the difficulty of it in any one of these instances.

A great secret of success in etching is to keep the arrangements for chiaroscuro simple, and to have a few kinds of texture as different as possible from each other, in order to obtain striking contrasts. Veyrassat's scale, in his small etchings, consists mainly of four notes, an intense black, for which a black animal is introduced as a pretext, two middle tints for earth, hay-stacks, loaded carts, lighter animals, and part of the sky, and lastly a very pale tint for the sky alone. At the top of the scale the blank paper takes its place as the highest treble. Then, in textures, we have about four textures kept very distinct, and all equally well done. Black velvet in the black animal, a coarse liny texture for foreground earth and vegetation, a much softer and closer texture for such things as hay-carts at a little distance, and lastly a very fine delicate



texture for skies. Now the reason why these etchings are so charming as technical music is because the artist has thoroughly mastered these few elements of effect, so as to use them in all their strength of contrast, and yet at the same time in perfect harmony, and as he works with few and widely-separated means of expression, they do not get confounded together by miscalculations in the biting. It is impossible to be more judicious ; the only wonder is that such a skilful artist should be so little adventurous, and rest contented with the repetition of one success. It remains to be observed that, with reference to natural truth and idyllic charm, few artists of the modern rustic school have so happily expressed themselves. All Veyrassat's groups of animals and peasants in the field are full of nature, and of art also, the art being successfully concealed, except in such very obvious points as the perpetual contrast of a white horse with a dark one.

Martial is an etcher of extraordinary industry. His collection of etchings on old Paris contains no less than three hundred plates, and besides this great work, he has published several other collections, such as the Salons of 1865, 1866, and 1868, Paris in 1867, Paris during the Siege, Paris Burnt, Paris under the Commune, the Women of Paris during the War, the Sailors at the defence of Paris, Les Prussiens chez nous, etc. The first etching I remember seeing by Martial was the "*Porte de la Sacristie du Collège à Beauvais*," and that etching was so very conscientious, besides being such sound work, that I afterwards studied everything by the same artist which happened to come in my way. There is some very rich and perfect work in the *Tourelle de l'Hôtel Schomberg*. In the *Rue du Pantour St. Gervais* the curious slope and curvature of the old Parisian house-fronts are quite rightly felt and rendered ; and in the *Rue des Prêcheurs* a gothic carved tree at the corner of the house, bearing ecclesiastics for fruit, is imitated with much delicacy. As might be expected from the usual effects of practice, M. Martial's labours have developed great manual





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local colour of the paint, altogether as ungrateful a subject as an artist might be condemned to execute—yet rendered with a simple, straightforward mastery over a hundred difficulties. Another very remarkable etching of the same class (though on a smaller scale) represented some houses at the angle of the Boulevard des Capucines and the Rue de la Paix, now demolished (including Tahan's shop). In this plate, all the relations of light, and most of the local colour too, were given with remarkable precision, whilst the drawing was neat and firm, as drawing must be to deal successfully with modern street architecture. The recollection of many other plates by Martial enables me to give an estimate of him as an artist, which, as his manner is entirely formed, will probably continue to be accurate. His two best qualities are a brilliantly clear conception of facts and perfect manual skill. He has no creative imagination, nor any tenderness; and therefore his work, though always admirable, can never be charming; never have any hold upon the heart. But notwithstanding this restriction, it is eminently valuable work in its own way, and future students of the history of Paris will be, or ought to be, very grateful for it. This is *historical* art in the truest and best sense, genuine history of what the artist has witnessed, first of that old Paris which Napoleon III. demolished, and then of those other and more fearful demolishings executed by shell and flame. Centuries hence such records will still be interesting, indeed the longer they are preserved the more interesting will they assuredly become.

LALAUZE. *La Leçon de Dessin.*—Two little girls are seated before two chairs, and very busily engaged in drawing. This etching deserves especial attention for its extreme refinement in interpreting the *quality* of things. It quite belongs to the highest class of object-study, that in which imitation is not slavish but artistic and intellectual. The treatment of all textures is admirable here, but I think the golden glittering



mystery of the picture-frames is the most unusual in the degree of its refinement. Lalauze truly sees as an artist, not fixing his attention upon one element of appearances to the detriment of the rest, but seeing the whole together, indicating just what is really visible at the distance, and not the smallest detail more. A gilt picture-frame is an excellent test of this peculiar capacity for seeing, since we *know* far more of the construction of a frame than we ever see at once, and the temptation to draw from knowledge rather than sight is very strong, on account of its far greater facility. The great technical merit in M. Lalauze's work is its surpassing truth of texture, and this is not obtained at any very great cost of labour, but simply by thoroughly understanding the nature of the appearance to be interpreted. In this plate we have the dress and hair of the little girls, the oak parquet and chairs, and the wall with the picture-frames, all perfect in their way. I hope, however, that the reader will not conclude, from the space just given to praise good texture here, that I attach more importance to it than it deserves. It gives a great charm to etching, and to painting also, a charm which has never been more appreciated than in our own day, when it is even one of the first essentials to any considerable popularity ; but there has been great etching, and great painting too, without any texture whatever. A higher merit in M. Lalauze is to understand the nature of children so perfectly as he does, and to be able to draw them without falling short of expression on the one hand, and without caricaturing it on the other.

VEYRASSAT. *Making a corn-stack.*—A tiny plate measuring  $3\frac{1}{2}$  in. by 2 in. A cart with three horses is near a stack and unloading. Three men are on the stack and one on the cart. There are two white (or light grey) horses, and one dark horse.

This may be taken as one of the forms of *the* Veyrassat etching. The dark horse supplies the low note, the pale cloudy sky behind the figures gives the treble, and the inter-



mediate tones are supplied by the landscape, stack, cart, and upper sky. Although the plate is so small, the texture of the foreground is very coarse and open, which affords a strong contrast with the textures of the stack and animals, and these, again, very different from each other, are both very different from the sky. It is in fact a quartett of textures playing together harmoniously, and the difficulty is not so much to imagine these various modes of execution as to make them yield their strong contrast without a discord.

MARTIAL *Théâtre du Vaudeville*.—A large plate representing one of the prettiest street corners in new Paris. Published in 1868.

This is a very good example of the strong, clear realism with which Martial interprets a subject. All is drawn with the most perfect firmness, and nothing shirked. The straight lines are ruled as in mechanical draughtsmanship, but no merely mechanical draughtsman could have put in the sculpture as it is given here, nor the trees and living figures. On the other hand, it would be difficult to find another artist who would patiently copy all the details which Martial has copied, such for example, as the lettering of the signs. To the right we have *Bignon, Glacier, Restaurant de Foy*; to the left *Salons du Café Américain*; and between these a great number of other inscriptions, all as legible as they would be in a photograph. So the panels in front of the Restaurant de Foy are copied with perfect accuracy. But although details are so strictly attended to, the plate produces a strong effect at a little distance also. No etching conveys more perfectly the idea that you are in modern Paris.

Nobody could go through such a piece of work as this without being thoroughly matter-of-fact in his ways of seeing and feeling. It is prose of the most resolute kind, without a trace of poetry. All that surprises me is that photography should not have prevented this kind of work by doing it still





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## CHAPTER XII.

### *VARIOUS FRENCH ETCHERS.*

QUEYROY, COROT, BRACQUEMOND, GAUCHEREL, FEYEN-PERRIN, LEGROS, BRUNET-DEBAINES, DE ROCHEBRUNE, CHAUVEL, CHAIGNEAU, ABRAHAM, VILLEVIEILLE, BALFOURIER, SOUMY, DE LONGUEVILLE, BALLIN, LANCON, DETAILLE, DE NEUVILLE.

HAVING studied in some detail a few of the more eminent French etchers, I now find myself restricted, by the limits of this volume, to a simple mention of the others, and of some of their principal works. It may easily happen that artists thus hastily alluded to may in future years distinguish themselves more than they have hitherto had time or opportunity for doing, and so deserve separate chapters in some future treatise on the art, written by another critic who will have the advantage of seeing our age from a greater distance. It is always difficult to be strictly just, and in this case the difficulty is greatly complicated by the fact that etchers have had to be selected quite as much because their plates were striking examples of very different styles of work as for qualities which may be considered meritorious. The activity and energy of the French school are so great that every year adds new names to the list, and every year some etcher already known to the public finds his relative position altered, either by his own labour or the labours of his contemporaries. It is therefore utterly impossible to give an account which shall remain permanently true of a school



which, being full of life, has life's incessant transformations. When etching was a dead art it was possible to sit down and give a systematic and proportionate account of its past history, but now that it is alive again, and more vigorously alive than ever it was before, the history which is complete when written will be behind the age a year after publication. It is as unsatisfactory in this respect as a "*Dictionnaire des Contemporains*."

The transition from amateur to artist is always a very difficult one to accomplish, even when there are perfect leisure and liberty for study, accompanied by an industry not to be discouraged. About fifteen years ago M. QUEYROY was an amateur, but by hard work and perseverance, accompanied by the kind of talent which consists rather in seeing things clearly as they are than in the gift of invention, he has become an artist of considerable skill. The etching of his which, on the whole, is the finest, is a large plate of *Loches*. This plate is good, especially for its breadth of light-and-shade, and its noble simplicity of treatment. The near dark tower to the left is as grand as it can be, and the water is very good and true, but there is a trace of old amateur practice in the fine old gateway which is glaringly out of drawing on account of its bad perspective.\* M. Queyroy does not seem to have studied perspective scientifically, which, for the representation of architecture, is an omission much to be regretted. Another thing which I observe in this generally noble plate of *Loches* is that the etcher has been too ready to substitute straight lines for what in the reality would be varied or interrupted lines. For example, the roof of the old gateway and that of the round tower nearer to the foreground are both outlined with straight lines; in the real thing they would certainly have been broken by the tiles, and very probably also in-

\* The side of the gateway which is in shade is nearly right. That which is lighted is altogether wrong, because the lines, if prolonged, would never reach what ought to be the vanishing point.



flected by the yielding of the woodwork under them. Mr. Ernest George has drawn the same gate, and gives it a very picturesque outline, perhaps exaggerated; but if so, exaggerated in the artistic direction as this in the mechanical. The tendency to ruled lines in M. Queyroy's manner is also very marked in his vast plate of the magnificent *House of Jacques Cœur at Bourges*, which is quite an architect's rendering of a building—clear and good of its kind, yet not like the etching of painters. Notwithstanding these criticisms, however, which I print merely because they may be of some use in directing the attention of other etchers to possible causes of imperfection which may be very easily avoided, I am far indeed from undervaluing M. Queyroy's work. His etchings, already very numerous, will possess a lasting interest as records of old France. He is always animated by an honest love of his subject; he has also quite sufficiently overcome the difficulties of art to express himself with perfect clearness. The *Rue des Arènes* at Bourges is one of M. Queyroy's most perfect plates. The Rue des Arènes is an old street with *tourelles*, and both mediæval and modern houses, which M. Queyroy has etched with equal care—rather too equal care, perhaps. He introduces figures well, not hesitating to draw them on rather a large scale in his more important plates, and grouping them very naturally.

I have never been a believer in the theory (rather commonly received amongst painters) that anybody who can paint can also etch if he will only condescend to do so. Etching is a most peculiar art in many respects, and even the simplest forms of it are not so simple as they look, for it is as difficult to make a simple thing look brilliant and effective as it is to get at effect by great labour. It is a great help, no doubt, for an etcher to be a good painter before he sets to work on the copper, because a good painter understands drawing and light-and-shade, which are the foundation of all graphic art; nevertheless it must be allowed that great painters sometimes





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recall to mind, by association of ideas, his charming work in oil, so full of the sweetest poetical sentiment. All sins are forgiven to the true poets. Corot may not be a great poet, as Turner was, but he is a true one. He feels the mystery of nature; he feels the delightfulness of cool, grey mornings and dewy evenings; he feels the palpitating life of gleaming river-shores and the trembling of the light branches wherein the fitful breezes play. He has an intense sense of the glimmering indecision and mystery of natural appearances, and he does not, as it seems to us, draw and paint with precision simply because his attention does not fix itself on that which is precise.\*

It would be unjust to omit an etcher of such masculine power as BRACQUEMOND, but his works are not always executed upon right principles, though his error has been quite of an opposite character to the formlessness of Corot. The veteran landscape-painter thinks only of relation, and not about individual form, but (in the plates at least which I now refer to) M. Bracquemond gives individual form with the utmost force and truth, without the slightest thought of relation. He contributed some plates to the *Société* which were perfect examples of this system of work, and of the perfection and imperfection that it leads to. One of them, *Le Haut d'un Battant de Porte*, represents part of a door in a farmyard, with four victims nailed to it, a crow, two hawks, and a bat. Each

\* It is a remarkable proof of the value of a direct expression, however defective in its manner, that Corot's etchings, with all their faults, should convey a better notion of the peculiarities of his genius than the far cleverer plates which Bracquemond executed after Corot's pictures. When Bracquemond translates Corot, all the pensive tenderness and lightness of touch are lost. Corot is a sensitive dreamer, dwelling in a world of his own. Bracquemond has a strong, clever, tough nature, admirably fitted for representing the field sports of strong men—as, for instance, in his capital sporting print, “Unearthing a Badger”—the physical life of animals, and such aspects of the external world as are to be apprehended by men in general who lead active lives and are a good deal out of doors. It is quite impossible that such a nature should have enough in common with that of Corot to be able to render a single thought of his.



of these is drawn with the utmost strength of imitation, but each of them is independent of the rest, and might be detached as a separate study. One feels this even more strongly in *Vanneaux et Sarcelles* (lapwings and teal); each bird is studied separately, the whole force of the artist's attention being concentrated upon it exclusively, without embracing the composition as a whole. A large flower comes against the nearest lapwing; every petal of it is strongly outlined, and then the surface is flatly shaded without any modulation from incidence of light. The principle of this work is not at all a bad principle for some kinds of decoration; it is quite right on a dinner-service or a screen, and we are very familiar with it in Japanese art; but it is wrong in pictorial art, and consequently in artistic etching, which ought to be synthetic above all things. At a later date M. Bracquemond began to study more synthetically, and one result of this change of purpose was "The Hare," which appeared in the *Portfolio* for May 1872. In this plate the artist still gave evidence of his knowledge of animal life, for the attitude and expression of the hare were as good as those of the birds in earlier works; but he now seriously attempted a general effect, and to some extent succeeded in an experiment with line and stipple, whilst the foreground plants, instead of being heavily outlined as before, were now treated as if they had been lightly sketched with a brush. The revolution in manner was therefore complete, since in the purpose of the artist synthesis had been substituted for analysis; and if M. Bracquemond had pursued etching regularly afterwards there can be little doubt that he would have taken a decided rank amongst the best etchers of the age. Unfortunately, however, for this particular branch of art, he accepted an engagement at Sèvres which has since occupied all his time.

M. LÉON GAUCHEREL is a well-known engraver who has brought to etching the knowledge of form acquired in another art. He is also a very skilful painter in water-colour. His



labours have been chiefly architectural, archæological, and decorative. All M. Gaucherel's etchings are distinguished by great clearness and knowledge, but they are generally rather hard and severe in manner, being conceived more from an architect's or an engraver's point of view than from a painter's. One of his plates, representing a narrow canal in Venice, between a garden and a lofty house, with a narrow footbridge at a considerable height above the water, appeared in the *Portfolio* for December 1873, and may be considered in all respects a representative example, having all the clearness of his work with its good drawing and perspective, and also the peculiar hardness just alluded to, which extends even to the foliage. M. Gaucherel has occasionally etched from pictures, and I shall have to recur to this part of his labours in another chapter. He was also one of the artists who etched Bida's designs for Hachette's magnificent edition of the Gospels ; and I may add (though this has nothing to do with etching) that he engraved on steel nearly three hundred ornaments for that wonderful book, and engraved them in a manner so faultless that it excelled all previous work in the same kind.

M. FEYEN-PERRIN has often etched from his own pictures, which for some time past have represented rather melancholy subjects, found on the coast of Brittany, amongst the fishing population. He has much true natural sympathy for the pathos of a hard life, especially as it touches women ; so, whilst too many of his brethren were painting the *demi-monde* of Paris, Feyen-Perrin went to study a nobler though less elegant kind of life on the sea-shore. He is not, however, a marine painter in the ordinary sense of the word, but one of the Great French rustic school akin to Millet and others, only studying the peasantry on the coast, with the influence of the sea upon their lives. I think the finest of Feyen-Perrin's etchings is the one called *Vanneuses de Cancale*. Two women are winnowing on the shore of a broad estuary. I have rarely seen a plate which with such simple means of execution con-





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faulty in a peculiar way which I will try to describe. The lines run together, and produce little black patches by chance, where they were not, could not be, definitely intended by the artist. There appears to be no knowledge of the resources of the art, except a difference in depths of biting; the same thin needle is used everywhere with little variety of texture. The best piece of execution that M. Legros has hitherto produced is *Le Bonhomme Misère*, and this is conceived rather like an old woodcut; however, it is a thoroughly fine piece of work in every way, and shaded and bitten in most perfect harmony with the subject. The mental qualities of this artist's work are always nobly serious, and must seem strangely so to those who believe in the universal levity of the French temperament. The legend of *La Bonhomme Misère* is this: Saints Peter and Paul visited one day a very poor old man, who possessed a hut and a pear-tree, and offered to grant him any wish that he might form, so he did not ask for wealth, but simply requested that whosoever climbed up into his pear-tree might not be able to get down again without his permission. In this way he caught a thief or two, and at length came Death to pay *Le Bonhomme Misère* a visit. The old man received him very pleasantly, and just begged him to be so good as to climb the pear-tree to get a certain ripe fruit which hung on one of the upper branches. Once there, Death could not get down again without the old man's express permission, so a treaty was concluded between them in consequence of which Misery dwells for ever upon the earth. M. Legros has chosen the moment when Death is up in the pear-tree holding out the pear in his skeleton fingers, and old Misery is looking up at him. The imaginative conception of the whole scene is worthy of some great solemn-minded old northern master. There is something awful too in the plate of the *Bell-Ringer* in the gloomy steeple chamber, with two children looking up at the bell, half in dread, whilst the ringer's grave face and bent figure indicate rather the fixed habit of a serious mind



"subdued to what it works in," than any fear of the loud-voiced thing that swings and rings above him. I like too very much the open and sweet gravity of the monk's portrait in a small square etching which just contains the head and neck, and cowl thrown back ; it is the face of a man whose thoughts rise far above the miserable details of the present, and dwell in the contemplation of the eternal. The large plate of a girl, a priest, and an old man coming out of church (the old man telling his beads), is full of the same sweetness and noble gravity. The girl has the aspect of a Madonna, and the men's faces are noble studies, both of them. Unfortunately, from the want of technical skill, the three heads are so exactly on the same plane that the girl appears gigantic. M. Legros has always taken a peculiar artistic interest in the Roman Catholic worship. Many an artist has been struck by the splendour of its ceremonies, by its golden and silk embroideries, candles, ornaments, imagery, incense ; but these things do not attract Legros ; he turns to the monk in his rough garment, and to the poor peasant maidens and old men in the humble village church, watches them as they pray, and draws them with an instinct of sympathy which, in its own peculiar kind, has no precedent in the fine arts.

Few etchers of the modern French school have produced such uniformly good work as M. BRUNET-DEBAINES. Two little plates of his published by Cadart, *La Place Royale à Dôle* and *À Verdun sur le Doubs*, are in their way simply perfection, faultless little gems of true etching like the little plates of Veyrassat, everything being well expressed that it was necessary to express at all, and not a stroke too much. Considering how little M. Brunet-Debaines has published in the way of original etching, it is surprising that he should be able to do such work as this, drawn evidently with the most enviable facility, and beautifully right both in all the delightful detail which is given of picturesque towers and houses, and in the shading of important masses. In other subjects,



where buildings occur whose architectural importance exacts a strict attention to perspective and to constructive detail, this artist goes through his work without neglecting either truth of construction on the one hand or pictorial effect on the other ; and it would be difficult to find in the etchings of architects or painters a manner of work better calculated to explain, at the same time, how an edifice was built and how it looked in sun and shadow. The tower in the *Rue des Grands Degrés à Blois* and the side of *Notre-Dame de Bourges*, with its window and doorway, and what is above the doorway, are both good instances of this. M. Brunet-Debaines is also one of the best living etchers from pictures, and I shall have more to say of him in that capacity.

The subject of architecture brings me to the work of M. DE ROCHEBRUNE, who etches it with great precision and richness of detail, combined with powerful light and shade. Two magnificent interiors of his \* have been published by M. Cadart in his annual portfolios (*l'Eauforte en 1874* and *l'Eauforte en 1875*). M. de Rochebrune is a painter of noble birth who has the rare privilege of living in one of the grandest of the old French châteaux, so that for these two subjects he had only to look at two sides of his own studio, and draw the chimney-piece and the door, gigantic constructions of semi-barbaric magnificence fit for some royal hall of the Elizabethan period. These etchings, which are large, are full of strong work in their kind, and prove a resolute determination to draw everything fairly and thoroughly, a determination which is rarely found in unison with such a vigorous sense of effect. The same substantial qualities may be observed in other works by M. de Rochebrune even when the subject is much less striking. He has illustrated the château of Chambord, the Louvre, the Hôtel Cluny, the châteaux of Blois, Pierrefonds, Écouen, and the cathedral of Strasbourg.

\* *Cheminée de l'atelier de Terre-Neuve, Vendée, and Porte de l'atelier de Terre-Neuve.*





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is evidently a limit to coarseness of texture in shading—a limit beyond which the lines cease to be shading altogether and become simply black bars with white spaces between them, or a network like a wire fence. M. ABRAHAM'S etchings of landscape deserve mention for a masculine and direct manner, but show little trace of any tenderness in feeling. The best are *Environs de Château Gontier* and *Bords de l'Oudon*, the first a scene in a forest amongst the boles of ancient trees, on rocky broken ground, well composed, and quite giving the impression of such a place; the other a piece of lowland river-shore, with tall thin graceful trees just well enough drawn to make one regret that they were not treated with the tenderness of Appian or Lalanne. It is not without pleasure that I mention here the name of VILLEVIEILLE, a landscape-painter of much feeling, who died, like our own Girtin, in early manhood. He had an exquisite sense of landscape beauty, which, however, is not nearly so apparent in his etchings as it is in his work in oil, which had the additional charm of a warm sunny colour not common either in the French school or in any other. A carping critic might here observe that I am going beyond the province of this book in speaking of an etcher's capacity as a painter; but it is not so, for in looking at an etching by Villevieuille I think, and think regretfully, how he would have painted the same subject. His etched work is so far inferior as to convey hardly anything of the painter's charm and sweetness. The two plates under the same title, *À Nohant-Vicq*—one representing an old thatched cottage, and the other an approach to a bridge under trees—are both interesting plates, but the latter is very violent in its lights and darks, the foliage being quite white in the lights, and all cast shadows as black as unmitigated printing-ink could make them. This, however, may have been due simply to technical inexperience, for in another plate by the same artist, *En Picardie*, which was given in the first edition of this work, Villevieuille had recourse to the *roulette* for his general tone, and escaped all false vio-



lence, attaining in place of it a harmony very like that of his pictures. The last-named etching is very simple in subject, but pervaded by a tender melancholy, which makes it linger in the memory for long.

M. BALFOURIER is a very experienced landscape-painter, who occasionally etches his own pictures. His system of work is simply to begin by putting in all organic markings and biting them rather deeply, after which he passes a veil of shading over the work to be bitten much more lightly. In some of his plates this division of processes is even too apparent, so that the work does not seem harmonised, but in others the technical method is quite successful ; and as the artist always chooses curious and interesting subjects his best plates are well worth preserving. I can heartily recommend two of them, *Marais près d'Elche* (Espagne) and *Une Usine à la Crau* (Var), both admirable interpretations of the picturesque of southern Europe. I observe that in M. Balfourier's work the immediate foreground and the far distance are rarely of much importance, but that nearly all his interesting material is to be found on the nearer middle distance, or what the French call *le second plan*. This is extremely judicious, because at that distance landscape material is most conveniently situated for a kind of study combining breadth with intelligible detail, and there is much less risk to the general harmony than there would be in a minute study of what lies quite close at hand. M. SOUMY, who was a *Prix de Rome*, has, I believe, done little in etching, but two of his plates, published under the same title, *Forges d'Allevar en Dauphiné*, are very charming, in a rather old-fashioned way, reminding one of Everdingen, and quite as good as the best work of that master. In these plates the artist treats broken ground and picturesque buildings very happily, with much breadth of light and shade, and considerable truth of tone. The BARON DE LONGUEVILLE is a naval officer and an amateur, but a very skilful amateur. No marine-painter whom I remember has better



expressed the majesty of a modern war-fleet. He is fond of naval magnificence, and understands it both artistically and as an observer of seamanship. The objection to his work is the grave artistic error of losing his darks in absolute black, so that his shadows are usually quite black. This is a complete mistake, due to a want of study of the inevitable artistic compromises. In the plate entitled *Sous Voiles courant grand Targue* this fault is visible only in the shadows on the nearest sails; but some other plates—as, for instance, *Au Mouillage* and *En Mer*—are altogether spoiled by it. In the first mentioned of these subjects the student cannot fail to remark the admirable rendering of the effect of six different distances on the appearance of a ship; this is the artistic purpose of the etching, and with right artistic cunning the nearest ship is brought close to the most remote one. The water is very liquid and good, and the sense of being at sea perfectly communicated. In the *Sous Vapeur* a steam fleet is going at speed on calm water, clouds of black smoke issuing from every funnel; I have never seen the sublimity of a steam war-fleet more impressively rendered. M. de Longueville has perfect mastery of his materials, and can do all he wants to do in etching, but he seems to have no aspiration beyond the lively and truthful rendering of what he knows. M. BALLIN is more ambitious; some of his plates of marine subjects are interesting historically, and have besides a picturesque interest of quite a peculiar kind, since they set before us the high-pooped ships that sailed and fought two hundred years ago. This kind of restoration is still quite possible, for we have ample evidence as to the construction of the ships, and the sea remains ever the same. M. Ballin appears to feel very strongly the grandeur of the old naval engagements, and draws them with great spirit. Since the war of 1870 there have appeared two or three very clever etchers of military subjects, such as Lançon, Detaille, and De Neuville. LANÇON draws animals capitally, a talent which





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# ETCHING AND ETCHERS.

## BOOK IV.

### *THE ENGLISH SCHOOL.*









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national temperament that some of the ablest artists and some of the best-informed critics are never wholly delivered from it, but are always liable to fall back into it, and to forget all larger and nobler ideas, either in the pleasure of simply imitating nature, or else in the kindred delight of enjoying such imitation when it has been cleverly and successfully accomplished. Even Mr. Ruskin tells the students at Oxford that the painting which is likest nature is best, and quotes with approbation Leonardo da Vinci's assertion, excusable only in an age when criticism was childish though art was strong and great, that the mirror is the master of painters, and that the proper way to test the merits of a picture is to compare it with the reflection of the living model in a looking-glass! This is a thing which in modern times could be said only by an English critic, and only to an English audience. The conception of art as something distinct from simple imitation is too generally admitted on the Continent for such a doctrine to be listened to or tolerated there, and the critic who acknowledged it as his own would be answered at once by innumerable voices, "We know better than that; we know that the true power of art is exhibited in forms which are not imitation, and are not compatible with imitation; that the work of the artist, as distinguished from that of the simple copyist of matter, is full of deviations from the truth as it would be seen in a mirror, these deviations being not faults to be corrected, but essential parts of the artistic expression, without which the work would be mindless. We know that the real labour of the artist (though the vulgar may not be aware of it) consists, not in giving a mirror-like image of things precisely as they are, but in a personal and original *interpretation* of their aspects, far, indeed, from the literal truth of a reflection on metal or on glass."

It may seem that this question has more to do with painting than with etching, but the truth is that the state of



general opinion with regard to imitation affects all the fine arts which concern themselves with the representation of natural objects. If you think that drawing is to be an imitation of nature and not an interpretation, there is hardly any piece of thoroughly great work in etching which will not be offensive to you, but if, on the other hand, you have accepted frankly the higher and greater conception of the fine arts, which leaves the pictorial artist as free to express himself as the musical or poetical artist, then the very peculiarities which would have irritated you before for their obvious lack of imitative truth, may possibly afford you a noble pleasure on other grounds, either as expressions of human energy or tenderness, or else because they may suggest to you some glorious or beautiful sight in nature to which they bear hardly any imitative resemblance.

The acceptance or refusal of etching in England, and the possibility of forming a great school of etchers in this country, depend more upon the public feeling about imitation than upon any other peculiarity of taste. So long as the idea prevails that the best art is that which is most like the reflection of nature in a looking-glass, so long will the work of the great etchers appear wilfully false and wrong, and there will be little public encouragement to follow in their footsteps, and to labour for the acquisition of any skill which would ultimately resemble theirs.

How deeply rooted this idea is may be seen in the current criticism of the newspapers, which too often proceeds on the tacit assumption that art has nothing to do but copy some natural model, and that the best art is that which imitates it most closely. "All art," said the *Morning Post* when reviewing the first edition of this work, "is essentially mechanical; the needle, the burin, the pencil, the brush,—these are all machines or tools worked by the hand to copy what the eye beholds, and the faithfulness of the copy constitutes the merit of the work. No graphic delineation can portray the



invisible, no artist can figure feeling ; this must be extracted by spectators themselves out of the imitated forms, as his was excited by the view of the originals."

Here you have a perfectly clear and intelligible expression of the prevalent English theory about art. Here it is clearly stated that the work of the artist is mechanical, that his only business is to copy what his eye beholds, and that the faithfulness of the copy constitutes the merit of the work. It is the mirror-theory taught officially to the Oxford undergraduates. It has the advantage of an extreme simplicity, and it has also the advantage of being the first theory of art which suggests itself to every totally uneducated mind, so that it is always sure of an immediate reception. The "leading journal," the *Times*, is awakening to the possibility of an artistic expression not strictly imitative, but the first dawning perception of the strangely new truth (familiar to every French critic since his boyhood) half bewilders the writer and half amuses him, so that he is not quite sure whether he ought to laugh at interpretative work or to treat it rather respectfully. Here is an extract from the greatest newspaper in England :—

"*The Hare—A Misty Morning*, by P. Braquemond. On first looking at the etching it produces upon the mind the impression of a bad dream. A hare with one huge solid ear, the fore part of its body in bright light, the hind part scarcely visible, squats in the foreground. In the middle distance are three strange shadows of other hares running at speed in different directions, and, farther off, three pigmy shadows of men. The resemblance to nature is remote, and yet this is a very good etching. The truth is, that the work of the etcher can, in many of its branches, be appreciated only by an educated eye. The etcher does not reproduce nature ; he translates it into a language of his own, a language abounding in subtle interpretations conveyed with extraordinary delicacy and harmony, but a language which very often appears but





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art which came to perfection two hundred years before he was born ! A word more, and we will leave this kind of criticism to those for whom it is intended. The writer in the *Times* cannot even read common drawing. He laughs at Bracquemond for having drawn a hare with one ear, whereas, in Bracquemond's plate, the hare has two ears, erect and back to back, he also sneers at the artist for not having shown the hind quarters of the hare more clearly, as if more of them could have been seen in that position, and he is puzzled by the local colour of the white fur and the brown, which seems to him an unaccountable sort of light and shade. And it is to a critic of this degree of culture and capacity that the *Times* entrusts the reputation of great artists—and its own ! \*

It would be unjust to leave the impression that we have no more advanced art-criticism than the specimens which I have just quoted, but they are fair examples of what may still be presented in the centres of English enlightenment, without calling forth either protest or contradiction. What is wanting in England is a general understanding of the true nature of artistic expression, which would enable the national mind to judge of these things for itself. It is not a matter of opinion, but of demonstrable fact, that great art is an entirely different thing from the reflection of material objects in a mirror, and this is quite clearly understood in other countries by cultivated people, whether professedly art critics or not ; why, then, cannot it be understood in ours ? Take the finest living models you can find, dress them or undress them as you will, take the biggest and best of mirrors, and then try to arrange your models and your light till the reflected image looks like a picture by Raphael, or Titian, or our own Sir Joshua

\* It may be observed that this contributor to the *Times* had to spell the names of two living artists in the course of his notice, and that he managed to spell them both wrong, though they were printed in capital letters in the volume of etchings which he was reviewing. What degree of accuracy in observation is to be expected from such a writer ?



Reynolds ! Do what you will, the reflected image will never resemble masters' work, but will seem only what it is, a reflection of simple nature. There never was a *tableau vivant* that really looked like a picture, the *tableau vivant*, when cleverly arranged, looks like a grouping of artists' models, but no more. So it is with landscape. Take your looking-glass out into the finest natural scenery you can find, it will never show you noble pictures of landscape, but only things like photographs with the addition of colour, and a far more brilliant light. Our fathers had a fearful and wonderful invention which they called a "Claude glass," a black mirror, which blackened nature for them, till they fancied that it looked like the old pictures in their galleries. They did, indeed, by this ingenious contrivance, mix the dirt of old pictures with the pure hues of nature, and so brought nature to the dinginess of the art which they admired, but not a branch of a tree, not an outline of a hill, accommodated itself in the mirror to the exigencies of artistic composition. All of Claude that the "Claude glass" gave, was the dust of two centuries in the darkened varnish ; it imitated neither the beauty of his arrangements nor the tenderness of his feeling.

Now, when you go into the heart of the matter, and by a thorough analysis of good artistic work endeavour to find out in what it differs from the reflection of natural objects in a mirror, you will soon discover, if your eye is sufficiently educated to discern differences of form, that the artist has been incessantly altering the appearances of things and forcing them into conformity with some conception in his own mind. It is by these alterations, and by these alone, that he can express his personal tastes and feelings. If all artists reflected nature as the mirror does, you would not, in a gallery, be able to recognise the work of different painters without the help of their signatures. All personal style in art is an alteration of nature. Every preference, every affection, destroys that impartiality of the mind which would be necessary to the



reflection of pure truth. Even what is popularly praised in art as truth is never exactly true, but is an exaggeration of some particular kind of truth, exhibited at the expense of others.

If people knew this, and knew how false in many ways is the art which seems to them most true, they would enter more easily into that kind of mutual understanding or tacit convention which is assumed by every powerful etcher to exist between himself and the public. It is a convention in some respects resembling that between the reader and the author of a book, by which the latter avails himself of letters and words for the conveyance of his ideas ; in some respects, I say, or to some extent, but etching is never quite so purely conventional as the signs of writing are. For example, the word "sunset" immediately suggests to the mind of an English reader the setting of the sun, but the word is *absolutely* conventional ; the choice of the letters which compose it, and of the shapes of the letters, has not been determined in the least by reference to any natural fact of form or colour ; and many other words in other languages convey precisely the same idea. Now let us see how a sunset would be represented in painting first, and then in etching. Suppose it is a red sunset, and suppose that the best landscape-painter in the world has painted it. He has represented it, let us say, by a disc of vermilion or red lead, but however skilfully he may have laid on the colour, there will still be so much conventionalism in the representation that it will not be recognisable by any one entirely outside of art and its conventions. Show it to an agricultural labourer, who often sees natural sunsets, the chances are that he will take it for a cherry. Now an etched sunset, equally well done, will have been done on the assumption of even more conventions than the painted one, and not only the agricultural labourer, but people of far higher education than his may not be able or willing to enter into these conventions, especially if they are looking for what they think





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light, and the peasant might have reason on his side, all things considered, if he concluded that the painted sun was more like a cherry than the dazzling orb of day.

Painting comes to us with the postulate: "Let it be granted that a lower light shall be understood to represent a higher light," and in all great interpretative painting there are so many other postulates besides, that it is always difficult to read until we are used to it. Etching comes with the chief postulate: "Let it be granted that the line, though in itself not true to nature, may be admitted as a means of expression." There are also many minor postulates, but especially this one: "Let it be granted that all truths are not to be given, but only a selection from them."

The granting of such postulates as these establishes between the artist and the spectator a certain agreement which may be called a convention, and in this sense both painting and etching are very conventional arts. But I wish to mark a clear distinction between this kind of necessary mutual understanding and what a sound criticism would denounce as a blame-worthy conventionalism. Let me give two instances to make my meaning plain. There is a right convention between educated spectators and educated artists, by which it is agreed that the dull and low light of oil-paint shall be understood to mean the splendour of the sun. This convention is a right one, because it is in obedience to the nature of things, for without it a sunset could not be represented in painting. Now let me give an instance of bad and foolish conventionalism. There was a conventional understanding amongst amateurs some time ago that the green of landscape was not to be painted. There was nothing whatever in the art which opposed itself in this instance to the free rendering of nature. Oil-paint, and water-colour also, *could* render green with great truth and power. The obstacle to the employment of this colour came from a purely arbitrary conspiracy amongst connoisseurs and amateurs, by which they had determined that



when fresh greens were introduced into a picture the work should be understood to be a bad work of art. Foolish conventionalisms of this kind appear as if they were devised for the express purpose of restraining the development of the fine arts, and although they originate with persons who profess to take an interest in the advancement of art, their influence is wholly noxious, and original men have to spend their force in contending against them, as Constable contended against the absurd prejudice which I have just mentioned as an example.

Now, in comparing the English with the French mind in relation to fine art, I should say that English people generally are much less liable to this latter kind of prejudiced conventionalism than the French are, and that so far they have a very great superiority over the French, but that, on the other hand, they are just as far inferior to the French in the capacity for entering into right conventionalisms and for granting necessary postulates. The English public has for the last twenty years been singularly free from all conventional prejudices about the fine arts, and there is no country in the world where new practices in painting have so good a chance of being fairly estimated on their merits as they have in England. But the English seem to have a peculiar difficulty in entering into those tacit understandings which the fine arts must always presuppose. Let me give an instance of what I mean. In Mrs. Oliphant's admirable novel *A Son of the Soil*, she gives a fine description of a rainbow, and then permits her readers to see what a young English gentleman thinks about it. "Young Frankland at the window could not help thinking within himself what a beautiful picture it would make 'if any of those painter-fellows could do a rainbow.'" \* Let us try to get to the bottom of young Frankland's ideas on the subject. He thinks a rainbow cannot be "done" in painting, because his

\* Observe the note of contempt with reference to artists—"those painter-fellows." This is quite usual in English fiction. The reader will find an essay on the subject, entitled "Artists in Fiction," in my *Thoughts about Art*.



eye does not receive the same sensations from a painted rainbow that it does from a real one, or, in other words, the "painter-fellows" cannot imitate the rainbow absolutely. Here is just one of those very numerous occasions on which the artist presupposes a tacit understanding between art and criticism, or what I have called a necessary convention. Painting cannot give the *splendour* of the rainbow, so we have the postulate: "Let it be granted that the painted rainbow is not to be so splendid as the natural one." Frankland does not understand this; he does not see that the "painter-fellows" ought not to incur contempt because they have not done that which they never pretended to do. He does not enter into the convention which is necessary both to the practice of art and to its enjoyment. He is intensely English in this; it is an intensely English idea that the purpose of art is imitation, and that where imitation is not achieved, art is a failure. Now let us go a step farther. For a painted rainbow let us substitute an engraved one. What would young Frankland say to that? He would say that the engraver was an idiot to attempt it. How can you imitate a rainbow with black lines? The answer to all such criticism as this is that the artist presupposes a certain understanding between himself and the spectator. In the picture the convention was that art should not be expected to imitate natural light, in the engraving that neither light nor colour should be imitated. But a finished engraving might still imitate the gradation and semi-transparency of a rainbow, and, in fact, these qualities have been often rendered in engraving. Yet even these are not indispensable to a work of art. A rainbow may be "done" with a few strokes of the etching-needle, or with common pen and ink, and be quite noble and valuable work. Hardly any imitation is possible with these limited means, yet they are right in art, and imply no weakness or folly on the part of the great artists who have so often used them. By the help of a convention into which the spectator is invited or supposed to





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*served, will have a better effect, will have more the appearance of coming from a master-hand, that is, in other words, will have more the characteristic and generale of nature than the most laborious finishing where this breadth is lost or neglected."*

A century later Mr. Seymour Haden wrote an article in the *Fine Arts Quarterly Review*, which inculcated the same principle.

"What, then, is the amount and kind of previous knowledge and skill required by the etcher? It is an innate artistic spirit, without which all the study in the world is useless. It is the cultivation of this spirit, not arduously but lovingly. It is the knowledge that is acquired by a life of devotion to what is true and beautiful—by the daily and hourly habit of weighing and comparing what we see in nature, and thinking of how it should be represented in art. It is the habit of constant observation of great things and small, and the experience that springs from it. It is taste which, a celebrated painter once said, but not truly, is rarer than genius. The skill that grows out of these habits is the skill required by the etcher. It is the skill of the analyst and the synthetist, *the skill to combine, and the skill to separate—to compound and to simplify—to detach plane from plane—to fuse detail into mass—to subordinate definition to space, distance, light, and air.* Finally, it is the acumen to perceive the near relationship that expression bears to form, and the skill to draw them—not separately—but together."

There have never been wanting, since art was practised in England, countrymen of ours who understood these things, and, therefore, who understood etching, but they have been too few in number to encourage sufficiently an art which depends upon a multiplicity of buyers. It is necessary here to enter briefly upon a question foreign to artistic considerations, the purely commercial question. The fine arts depend upon a sufficient sale of their products. This brings us to one of the most surprising peculiarities in the commerce of



the fine arts, one of those peculiarities which no human being would ever guess by his own wisdom, but which the experience of business teaches us. To a person not practically versed in such matters, it would seem that the power of multiplying a work of art would be a source of wealth to the artist. It certainly would be so in any manufacture which had simple utility for its purpose, and was not in any way dependent upon opinion. No one could create a fortune by making steel pens, if steel pens were not multipliable by the million. Nobody could become rich by drawing designs on calico, but calico-printers become immensely wealthy by multiplying such designs. In the region of fine art, on the contrary, the productions which are multipliable bring in less to the producer than those which are not multipliable, and it is positively a misfortune for an art that its products should have facilities for being multiplied. Painting is lucrative, because every picture is unique. If pictures could be printed in perfect colour, no single copy would be worth more than a small fraction of what the original is now, and it is likely that after deducting the expenses of printing, with the profits of the publishing and the retail trade, the net proceeds for the author of the work would be much less than they are at present. There is, indeed, another side to the question which we may not altogether overlook. When the sale of a work of art is very great, then indeed the aggregation of small profits on many copies is a compensation for the loss of uniqueness in one of them. A very popular novelist is a producer of works of art who finds it greatly to his advantage to be able to multiply his products. But now consider the position of the etcher. His work is not unique, on the one hand, like that of the painter, and on the other hand, although it could be multiplied as novels are, if there were a demand for it, this is not practically an advantage owing to the absence of such a demand. The etcher has, therefore, to a certain extent the disadvantages of artists in



colour and artists in language, without enjoying enough of the advantages of either to be a compensation. His works are multiplied, and therefore they are not unique, but they are not multiplied enough.

The commercial experience of artists who can etch and paint equally well is, that they cannot afford to etch. This is the real reason why so little has been accomplished by the English school. Collectors will give a thousand pounds, or three thousand, for a picture, but they will give a high price for an etching only when other people cannot get it, and in the case of a new plate it is known that anybody can get it. "Men do not purchase pictures," Archdeacon Fisher wrote to Constable, "because they admire them, but because others covet them." The truth is, that the motives for purchasing are mixed, but that one of them is to have the satisfaction of being envied. This accounts for the extraordinary value of unique things.

Etching has been practically sustained in England by the occasional labours of painters who have worked simply from an interest in the art. A few of them have reached considerable technical skill, even in this desultory way, and with this very slight degree of external encouragement, one or two have produced etchings which will bear comparison with the finest work of other countries and times. Many amateurs have attempted etching in England, and a very few have succeeded.

Etching clubs existed in England long before the foundation of the French *Société des Aquafortistes*. The elder club was composed from the first of many well-known painters, who met together in a friendly way, and illustrated some favourite poet, or combined to publish their own independent inventions. Their first publication was the *Deserted Village* of Goldsmith, accompanied by eighty etchings of small size, and finished carefully. Many of them are very pretty, and they have a predominating character, evidently derived from the delicate little engravers' vignettes which were common





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aimed at making etching *pretty*. The art is versatile enough for anything, and if you aim at prettiness you may attain it, but every art has its own especial tendencies, and it does not seem that the tendencies of etching lie in that direction. A strong direct expression of consummate knowledge and passionate feeling are what the art is best suited for, and most of its grandest works are not only not pretty, but their qualities are vigorously the opposite of prettiness. Whilst fully recognising the different merits of English work, its sincerity in the study of nature, its general absence of false pretension, its good intellectual or literary qualities which enable it to interpret the masterpieces of literature, often with great liveliness and a true sympathy with the writers, I have always regretted that on the technical and purely artistic side it should have done so little towards educating a public which needed educating so much. There has been a technical mistake, too, in very much English etching, that of struggling painfully after tone. The failures to which this led are so obvious that they made me speak of some English etching, in the first edition of this work, with a degree of severity which I have since regretted, not that I wrote anything which was untrue, but what I did write might have been expressed more kindly. Yet I was not alone in the dislike to that kind of shading which is at the same time elaborate and false in its tonic relations. Mr. Ruskin wrote against it later, briefly and decisively, going much farther than I had done, and asserting that complete light and shade was never possible in the art at all, whilst all good etchings were done with few lines, a decision which at once condemns the entire work of the English Club\* and the greater part of foreign work along with it. The plain truth is, that the more we learn of light and shade the less we feel able to endure that which is patiently and elaborately wrong; and it is not much to be wondered at if a critic is led to write severe things when he sees artists of

\* Except here and there some outline sketch by a sculptor.



reputation taking great pains to shade properly, then trusting their work to an acid bath which upsets the relations of all its tones, and finally publishing the spoiled plate. This is the reason why critics who love light and shade most are likely to be the least tolerant of it after disasters in the acid, and it is these very critics who are likely to insist most on the capacities of the line in etching, because the line is so much less dependent for its effect upon a precise accuracy in biting.

One of the most important events in the history of English etching was the appearance of Mr. Haden's plates in 1866. Full justice is done to the merits of these works in the present volume, so that the reader will not suspect me of undervaluing them, if I express my lasting astonishment at their immediate and decisive success. The public was apparently very little prepared to appreciate work of that uncondescending kind, and the press had never shown much knowledge of the subject, yet the native force of Mr. Haden's manner overcame the general apathy, and great numbers of people who had never heard of etching before, or who thought it meant drawing with the pen, were made aware of the existence of the art by the articles on Mr. Haden's publication. It seldom happens that the fashion selects the best man, but in this instance it really did so in one especial sense. Several members of the Etching Club were more experienced artists than Mr. Haden, but not one of them was so purely and essentially the etcher. It was even an advantage to him to be an amateur, for not having the habits of either a painter or an engraver, he formed for himself a set of habits adapted to his own peculiar branch of art, and entered into the spirit of it without reference to any other. The quotation already given from an article of his in a review has shown what that spirit is. Not only was Mr. Haden's first publication entirely successful, but when, some years later, he published an etching of the *Agamemnon*, the public took copies of it (at three guineas each) in such quantities that, as nearly as I can



calculate, the time spent upon the plate must have been paid for at the rate of a guinea a minute.\*

As we are enumerating the different causes which have aided the revival of etching in this country, it would be an omission to pass entirely without notice the reception of the present volume, which certainly proved an awakened interest in the art. Although, in its first form, an expensive book and a book on an unpopular subject, it rapidly made its way and found a thousand buyers, nor has the demand for it ceased with the cessation of the supply. We may therefore fairly conclude that it may have had some influence upon opinion, at least in drawing attention to the subject, and in provoking the discussion of problems which we can never thoroughly understand without enlarging our views of all the graphic arts.

Soon after the first publication of this book, it occurred to me that as there was no periodical in England which would publish an etching,† it might be a good thing if a new one were founded which would make etching an important part of its system of illustration. I was much interested, at the same time, in the new photographic processes which had been invented for the reproduction of pictures and designs, and it seemed to me that much might be done with these also. I mentioned this idea to a friend who is a member of a well-known firm of publishers, and he at once approved of it, so that we determined to start the *Portfolio*, an art-monthly, the first number of which appeared on the 1st of January 1870. It is beyond the province of these pages to say anything of the literary side of this undertaking, which had its own purposes and its own

\* This seems to contradict what has been already said in the present chapter about the public indifference to etching, but the case of the *Agamemnon* is a very singular exception to the general rule. The reader will understand that I cannot mention instances of failure, which have been much more frequent.

† I mean as a work of art. A few etchings may have been published in one or two of the older magazines, but simply as comic illustrations, or likenesses of celebrated men, not for artistic interest or quality.





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absolutely deprived of all encouragement in money,\* and was kept alive only by the occasional labours of a few painters who pursued it in their hours of leisure. It was rather fashionable at one time amongst ladies as an amusement, and a manual of the process was published for their guidance ; but an art which taxes to the utmost the powers of the most accomplished artists, and their patience, is not well chosen as a pastime, and is seldom persevered in long.

In looking to the future of etching in this country, I have some hopes, but they are of a very moderate kind. The *Portfolio* will go on doing its work, and prevent the appearance of an etching from being utterly unfamiliar. Once in a century some genius may appear and attract attention to the art, as Mr. Haden did. But before etching can ever be generally understood in England there must be a complete revolution in the national habit of thinking about art. The majority of Englishmen have hitherto believed art to be simply an imitation of nature ; they must learn to think of it as an interpretation ; they have believed it to be the work of the eye and the hand ; they must learn to think of it as "the work of the mind."

\* Except in the case of Mr. Haden, and even in his case, the encouragement came unexpectedly after the plates were published at his own risk, and not as an inducement to etch them.



## CHAPTER II.

### *TURNER.*

**I**N a work devoted exclusively to one branch of art, it may be thought that artists ought to be studied only in that; but I find that their labours in other departments throw light upon all their work, and when a painter has done great things on copper, it is always interesting to know what he has done on canvas. There is no difficulty here with regard to Turner; his pictures are so well known, even the collection which was his bequest to the nation represents him in all respects so perfectly, that every reader who cares about art, and has been in London, is sure to have formed an opinion of Turner from the original documents themselves. Even in the case of American or colonial readers, the engravings from Turner's pictures in oil and water-colour give an idea of his quality as a painter sufficiently comprehensive for our purpose.

Of all his powers, the one which just now most immediately concerns us is the minute subdivision of weights of colour, as lights and darks, which made his tonality so elaborate, so much more elaborate than that of the landscape-painters who preceded him. This was the technical quality which, more than any other, made his works translate themselves so well in engraving. I have said that perfect tonality in etching is difficult and rare; there are instances of it, but these instances are not numerous. If we could suppose the position of a critic who, whilst remaining entirely ignorant of what Turner had done as an etcher, had nevertheless made himself conversant with the works of all the notable etchers,



we should not be far wrong in guessing that the critic's strongest feeling of curiosity about the etchings of Turner would be concentrated on this one point—their tonality. He would be anxious to ascertain how far this great master of tonality had overcome the difficulty of it in etching; and if with this feeling he came across a collection of Turner's plates, he would be much disappointed. Turner was a first-rate etcher *au trait*, but he did not trust himself to carry out chiaroscuro in etching, and habitually resorted to mezzotint for his light and shade. His etchings were always done from the beginning with reference to the whole arrangement of the chiaroscuro, and he never laid a line with the needle without entire understanding of its utility in effect. But the effect itself, in Turner's etchings, is always reserved for mezzotint, and it results from this habit of his, that Turner is not so good an example for etchers, or so interesting a master to study, as if he had trusted to pure etching for everything.

I had promised myself in this part of the book to avoid technical matters as far as might be possible, because it appears that when general readers come upon technical explanations they have a way of skipping them. But with reference to mezzotint and etching, and the manner of their combination, some explanation of this kind is inevitable. An etched shade, as the reader is already aware, is produced by lines which are drawn with a point on a varnished plate (the point removing the varnish where it passes), and afterwards bitten in with aquafortis; but a shade in mezzotint is *left*, and the passages in mezzotint which are perfectly white are the places where the plate has been scraped till the bur is all gone, and then polished with a burnisher. When etching and mezzotint are used in combination on the same plate, the etching is done first, and in simple lines, which are bitten in more deeply than they would be if the plate were intended to remain a pure etching; then the plate is roughened all over with a tool on purpose, and which produces *bur*—that is,





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which is like the bars of a portcullis. The scales of the dragon, the heavy indications of trees, the foreground markings of vegetation, are all so bitten that the paper shows them behind in deeply sunken hollows. From these tremendous corrosions, Turner passed to light indications of distance, as, for instance, in the unpublished plate of Dumbarton, which gives one of the most delicate and charming distances ever etched. There is a small rough etching of Eton, with a man ploughing, without mezzotint, which is a good instance of Turner's tendencies in biting, and is one of the most interesting of his attempts, because it shows in exaggeration the sort of quality he aimed at in etching.

It is not fair or just to Turner to judge him as an etcher by taking proofs of plates which were obviously intended for mezzotint, and many of which have since received mezzotint, either from his own hand or that of his engraver. From a desire to economise time, or perhaps simply from imitation of Claude's "*Liber Veritatis*," Turner never relied upon etching to render effect, and does not seem ever to have studied it as an independent art. The kind of work he aimed at in etching was an indication of form, like the pen-work with which he would often add firmness and precision to a sepia drawing. The wash with the brush was to be imitated in mezzotint, and the difference between his combination of sepia and pen-drawing, and his combination of mezzotint and etching, was chiefly a difference in the order of procedure. When he worked on paper, the broad washes were first given, and the pen-markings added at the last; but when he worked on copper, the lines were etched first, and then the shades added by himself or another engraver. This reversal of method offered, of course, no difficulty whatever to Turner, who, having a perfect hold of his subject, could treat it in any way he liked; and what I infer from his choice of this combination is, that Turner was not anxious to win celebrity as an etcher, but merely used etching and mezzotint as the most convenient processes



for rendering his sepia studies. In this want of an etcher's ambition lies the distinction between Turner and some other great men who have employed the process. He made use of etching as an auxiliary, and worked well within the limits of the sort of etching he proposed to himself, but he never tried what the process was capable of. It would have been much more interesting to students of this particular art, if Turner had been thrown entirely on his own resources, without the help of mezzotint; and it would have been especially interesting to see how far in pure etching he could have rendered the marvellous subdivisions of tonic values which we wonder at in his pictures and drawings. As a mezzotint engraver, Turner ranks exceedingly high, but his merits in that art are beyond our present purpose. One thing, however, cannot be outside of our province, the possibility which etching possesses of happy combination with mezzotint, and of which Turner so successfully availed himself. It is certainly a fortunate quality in an art to be complementary of another art, so that the two together produce results of remarkable value at a minimum cost of labour. The great freedom and force of the etched line, its immense power of firm and rapid indication, are exactly the qualities in which mezzotint is most deficient; and though etching can by shading, especially if helped by dry-point work, arrive at chiaroscuro not less elaborate than that of the mezzotint engraver, it achieves this at an expense of toil and effort which it is not an exaggeration to estimate at three times the labour which he gives for the same result. It is remarkable that, in spite of the value now attached to the prints in the "*Liber Studiorum*," this marriage of two arts so naturally complementary has not been more frequently repeated; but when Turner issued these plates they had little success, quantities of fine proofs from them were used to light fires, and if they have risen since then in market value, so that a complete set of them is now worth hundreds of pounds, the rise is to be attributed, *not* to any



appreciation of their quality as art, but to the fame which Turner acquired in other ways, and chiefly by popular engravings from his water-colour drawings. When an artist has once become famous, people buy his works whether they like them or not, and they end by believing that they like them ; but the prints in the "Liber Studiorum" have never been really popular, and even now, when the public may still get some of them for a few shillings each, they generally prefer a showy print from Landseer or Frith. The combination of etching with mezzotint may, however, as art-culture advances, become sufficiently popular to be employed in landscape illustration on a more extensive scale ; and if this should ever be, the etchers of the future will have the advantage of models, in the etchings of Turner, of which it is not too much to say that on all technical points, in the application of artistic judgment to method, they are so sound and safe as to be beyond criticism.

Of his mental grasp, of his imagination, it is scarcely necessary to speak here, but a few words on the preparatory studies which led to his success as an etcher will not be out of place. He was much in the habit of drawing forms *with the point* of a sharply cut and rather hard lead pencil, and the transition from this to the etching needle was natural and easy. In his system of study he divided form from light and shade, and afterwards carried out the division in his etchings, using the needle for form and the scraper for light and shade ; but there is a subtle difference between his etchings and his point-drawings. In the point-drawings, form is often indicated with very little reference to light and shade ; in the etchings the arrangement for chiaroscuro is always present in Turner's mind when he lays his lines, and he omits all lines which interfere with it, or even which are simply useless to it. This is a great secret, an open secret, yet one hidden from many artists and nearly all amateurs.

It would not be right to leave Turner without acknow-





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Priam, sought Hesperia in the woods ; and Turner, with that love for water which characterises all true landscape-painters, has assigned as the place of their fatal meeting one of those sweet little solitudes which from time immemorial have been dear to poets and lovers. She is seated on the gently sloping ground at the edge of a shining pool ; the water has been lately divided by stones, which to the left of the etching rise visibly above its surface, but it pauses at the feet of Hesperia, where she sits, as she thinks, alone. Æsacus, still unperceived by her, has just discovered her, as he breaks through the branching fern. Over the head of the nymph bends a boldly-slanting tree, and where its boughs mingle, to the left, there is a passage of such involved and wild and intricate beauty, that I can scarcely name its equal in the works of the master-etchers. Over the head of Æsacus, and between the trunks of the two principal trees, is a glade full of tender passages of light, which are chiefly due to the work in mezzotint, so that this plate may be taken as a transcendent example of Turner's power in both arts. The brilliant freedom of the etched branches, the mellow diffusion of light in the tinted glade, are both achievements of the kind which permanently class an artist.

*Dumbarton* (unpublished).—This plate was no doubt prepared for mezzotint, but it is in some respects an advantage for our present purpose that the mezzotint has not been added. It is scarcely probable, considering the disposition of the lines, that the effect of light and shade was intended to be a powerful one. The artistic motive of the composition was space and beauty, rather than force and contrast. The view is wide and fair, and the last waves of the granite ocean which tosses its highest crests on Cruachan and Ben Nevis come undulating here in long slopes to the edge of the lowland plain. Out of the Clyde the last expression of the exhausted mountain energy rises far off—the fortress-rock of Dumbarton. Against this beautiful distance, Turner will bring no rudely contrasting



tree, but gives us the slender and delicate acacia,\* with all its pendent flowers. Leading thus from the faint lines of the distance to the stronger work of the foreground, he has obtained by this transition a natural passage to the massiveness of the great trees to the left. The reader is especially entreated to allow himself to receive impartially the full and sweet amenity of this composition, for there are etchings of Turner in which his many-sided mind sought qualities very different from amenity.

*Weedy foreground. Man ploughing.*—This etching is not to be confounded with the larger plate of the same subject which was afterwards engraved in mezzotint. Over the plough is a view of Eton College, and space has been left in the middle of the plough for the introduction of another figure: to the left a woman sits with a baby in her arms. The weeds in the foreground are very heavily bitten, so as to give an impression of great coarseness, but there is an etcher's intelligence even in the rude marking. This habit of over-biting was due, as I have already observed, to Turner's preparation for mezzotint, and intention of printing in warm brown instead of black. It cannot be recommended for imitation, unless under the same conditions.

*Inverary Pier. Loch Fyne. Morning.*—This view of Inverary shows as well as anything, in the "Liber Studiorum," what sort of duty Turner intended his coarse etched lines to do. The combination of etching with mezzotint was a marriage of two opposite arts. Turner, therefore, avoided in his work with the needle every kind of labour which might intrude upon the domain of mezzotint; he even did more than this, and purposely sought in every etched line a quality the very opposite of that softness and tenderness of tint which became his chief objects when he took up the tools of the engraver. The striking contrast between methods of work in this plate

\* The tree looks like an acacia (*Robinia*), but it is far north for one at Dumbarton, except perhaps in a garden.



is focussed in the very centre of it. The pale mountain towards Glen Falloch is engraved with aerial delicacy, the morning shadows fall in soft gradations from the risen wreaths of mist, and against the very tenderest passage of all, the opening of the distant glen, come the stiff mast and coarse sail of a fishing-boat, of the firmest and boldest execution. The heavily etched anchor rising out of the shallow water in the foreground sets its iron rigidity, by a similar contrast of method, against the soft and liquid surface. To the left this coarseness loses itself more gradually in greater manual refinement, and the transition from the dark boat under the pier to the far trees on the edge of the wooded hill is managed by a subtle blending of lighter and shallower bitings with rich full shades of mezzotint. The engraving here, as in the "*Æsacus and Hesperia*," was all done by Turner's own hand.

*Jason*.—When I use the word "coarse" in speaking of the etchings of Turner, or any other master, let it not be understood in the artistic or intellectual sense, but only in the common acceptation of the word, as we say that canvas is coarse when the threads of it are thick and the spaces large. There is as much artistic feeling in coarse canvas as in the finest web from the Indian loom, and the coarseness or fineness of a woven tissue is a quality merely relative to the keenness of human sight. The work in Turner's "*Jason*," which in common language may be justly called coarse because the lines of it are thick and deep, is, in the intellectual sense, considerably more refined than the most minute work of the modern English and Germans. The combination of the highest mental refinement with some roughness of material accompaniment is as natural as that other very common combination, of perfect visible finish with low intellectual culture. The reader may remember Mr. Ruskin's vivid commentary on the imaginative force in the conception of this dragon; and it may be observed with reference especially to etching that its merely executive qualities are





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tage of harmonising with the rugged material. When the foreground is occupied by things whose nature is opposed to human effeminacy, and affords enjoyment to none but our hardest instincts, the iron pencil may be blunt and strong, and the hand of the artist resolute ; but we might not safely infer from the success of such work as this that it would be well to apply a like method to all foregrounds. A living aquafortist has advanced the theory that all foreground work should be open and coarse, and that the lines should become finer and closer as they recede into the distance. In the case of a subject of this kind the theory is sound ; but when, instead of an impression of wildness, we would convey an invitation to repose, it may be wiser to allure the spectator by surfaces which promise him ease. Mountain scenery has hitherto been very incompletely illustrated in etching. There are immense difficulties in the treatment of distant effect which have not yet been overcome either by the old masters or our contemporaries. Turner's use of mezzotint was an evasion of these difficulties, and the effect of drifting mist and broken light beyond the bridge in this design is rendered in pure mezzotint.



PLATE X.

ROCKS AND PINES,

**AFTER J. M. W. TURNER, R.A.**

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etchers. The dramatic conception is lively and good, but the workmanship is uninteresting and commonplace.

Andrew Geddes was a good etcher, hitherto not sufficiently appreciated. His dry-points are especially fine ; the one of a little girl holding a pear is charming for its freedom and grace. There is a portrait by him with the odd title "Give the Devil his Due," very luminous and well modelled ; and another portrait of a lady in a hood, of which the reader is recommended to study an early impression of the fourth state. The hood is exceedingly fine in dry-point work. His "Head of Martin, an auctioneer at Edinburgh," is very clever and characteristic : I only know one state of it. His landscape without title (a clump of trees and wooden building under it) is free, and right in workmanship. In the first state there is no signature, and the sky is dirtied with sandpaper. In the second state the sky is cleared, but light indications of cloud are introduced : there is still no signature. In the third and fourth states there is a signature in the right hand corner, and a sulphur tint is introduced for cloud. Of these states the second is technically the best, and may be taken as a fair example of dry-point. This landscape and "The little Girl with the Pear," like the "Pope and Censer" and "Gentleman at his Desk" of Wilkie, are enough of themselves to entitle the author to honourable mention.

WILKIE. *The Pope examining a Censer.*—As this is one of the finest etchings ever produced in England, it may be worth while to inquire what are the sources of its power. The draughtsmanship is of that happy kind which, fully possessing precision, allows itself perfect freedom. There is a close analogy between freedom of this kind and the freedom of the most beautiful manners. Clowns have freedom amongst themselves, but they have not manners ; semi-gentlemen have manners without freedom, because they think about rules, and force themselves into a disciplined conformity ; but in the



perfect gentleman the time of discipline is past, and his manners are as free as if he had never submitted to it. The work in this etching is so easy, and at the same time, where necessary, so accurate and precise, that if it were the only production of its author we should infer from it the long labours of his youth. The firm drawing of the Pope's face and the fingers of the left hand, the true and graceful festooning of the rapid lines which indicate the censer-chains, contain the two extremes of freedom and precision in method, between which the greatest etchers range at will. The Pontiff has a royal naturalness of attitude, and quietly examines the work of the goldsmith, who presents it humbly on his knees.

*The seat of hands.*—This plate has no title, but is marked in the British Museum "Boys and Dogs." Two boys are making a seat by grasping each other's arms, and a girl, who is going to sit down upon it, is criticising the arrangement. A dog precedes the party. It is a graceful little subject, like those which were often adopted by the best portrait painters of the last century in family groups. The execution is very spirited and light. The rich dry-point work in the third state has much improved the plate. The opportunity is a good one for marking the difference between curiosity-collecting and the love of art. I know not whether the first state of this plate is rare or common, but I know that if the first state is rare, and the third common, all genuine collectors for curiosity will pay ten times as much for the incomplete as they would for the finished work. It is only artistic criticism which sets the highest value on the latest states. Of course the plate must not be worn, but a real judge knows a good proof when he sees it without any mark of rarity to guide him.

*Gentleman at his Desk.*—A gentleman is seated in a large arm-chair, and is writing a receipt at his desk. A man is waiting for the paper, and stands behind the chair. The gentleman's wife is looking on whilst he writes. There is a



dog, which is scratching itself, and there are several small details, such as a boot-jack, sticks, etc. Next to the masterly indication of character in the faces and attitudes, this plate is remarkable for its sound quality of dry-point work. If the reader is a practical etcher, he ought to study the rich effect of the background, the darks under the bureau, and near the gentleman's feet, and the slight yet sufficient indications of detail.

*Reading the Will.*—A lawyer, who is seated on an old-fashioned chair, with his back to the light and a large table before him, is reading a will to expectant heirs. The study of expression is of the kind which made Wilkie popular, and need not be expatiated upon in this place. Wilkie seems to have hesitated between two directions as an aquafortist. The execution here is of the sort common in England, the execution of the "Pope and Censer" of a sort unfortunately not so common. If etching were limited to work of this kind, it would be truly no better than a somewhat easier substitute for engraving; having indeed the advantage of being executed by the artist's own hand, but beyond this no special quality or power. The steady equality of workmanship, the patience to bring all things to an equal point of finish, may prove sanity of mind and freedom from all morbid irritability of nerve, but it proves also some dulness of perception by its very impartiality, and a state of mind which differs from the high artistic spirit by its perceptible tendency towards Philistinism. For Philistinism penetrates even into the very realm of art itself, and may be always known, even in its feeblest manifestation, by a sort of prosy conscientiousness.

GEDDES. *Little girl holding a pear.*—She is seated on the ground, and wears a white dress; her head is relieved against a dark tree; she holds out a pear in her left hand. The dress is very slightly indicated. The whole work is in dry-point.





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## CHAPTER IV.

### *RUSKIN.*

**I**T has been one of my purposes in the course of this volume to direct the reader's attention to the most opposite kinds of etching, in order that he might fully appreciate the versatility of the art, and have the widest possible field for technical choice if he intended to practise it. Mr. Ruskin's work in etching is very different from that of all the artists whom we have hitherto been studying, and, therefore, for that very reason, if for no other, would probably deserve our attention. But Mr. Ruskin has other claims than the originality which springs from perfect sincerity. He draws landscape and architecture with the most delicate feeling and the clearest knowledge, so that, although not professionally an artist, he is certainly an accomplished practical student of art.

Mr. Ruskin's merits as a draughtsman would perhaps have obtained a more general and decided recognition if they had not been overshadowed by his celebrity as a writer. The disposition to deny capacity in two different occupations is so strong, that a good writer has always a peculiar difficulty in obtaining recognition as a painter or draughtsman. This prejudice is especially strong amongst professional painters, who are generally slow to admit the merits of a student who is what is called an "amateur," that is, who does not labour for his bread. If they cannot deny the excellence of his work, they will sometimes even go so far as to say "he did not do it ; some artist did it for him." \*

\* An instance of this came one day under my own observation, and is mentioned here because the case is a typical one. I was looking through the portfolios of an



The exact truth about Mr. Ruskin's work in practical art seems to be this :—He is a thorough student, but not an artist, and if not an artist it is rather from self-imposed limitations than from any natural incapacity. I am not sure, however, that in his thinking about art Mr. Ruskin has ever got quite clear of the prevalent English conception of it as a simple imitation of nature, already noticed in the chapter on the revival of etching in England, and his practice seems to have been subservient to this conception. The desire to represent nature as in a mirror, and the feeling that the work is safe from criticism when this is done as nearly as the means at the disposal of the artist will permit, appears to lie beneath Mr. Ruskin's practice and to account, at the same time, for its merits and for its limitations. The mirror-theory advocated at Oxford may be taken as evidence of this, and there is a sentence in the preface to the fourth volume of *Modern Painters* which, in a very few words, conveys to us the author's views of artistic responsibility. Speaking of his own beautiful drawing, which was engraved as a frontispiece to the third volume under the title "Lake, Land, and Cloud," the author says—"the sky is a little too heavy for the advantage of the landscape below ; but I am not answerable for the sky. It was *there*."

For this view of artistic responsibility all that can be justly

eminent painter who is usually very severe in his criticism of Mr. Ruskin, and finding one of the best soft-ground etchings in the "Seven Lamps of Architecture," I thought the opportunity a good one for bringing my friend to admit some artistic capability in the etcher. To my great surprise, he entirely agreed in all I had to say in favour of the plate ; but when I came to the conclusion, and congratulated my friend on having overcome his prejudices against the author of the "Seven Lamps," he answered me with the following syllogism : "A man ignorant of art cannot produce a good etching. Ruskin is ignorant of art, therefore Ruskin has not produced this etching."

The fact that the plate was signed *J. R. del. et sc.* made no difference, and of course the more I showed the command of means of which the plate gave evidence, the less would my friend believe it to be Mr. Ruskin's work. Every good quality in the work of art was considered, *not* as evidence that Mr. Ruskin was an artist, but that, being an amateur, he could not have done it.



said is that it may be admissible with reference to a study, done for the student's own private instruction, and not intended to be shown to the public. Suppose the case of an artist and his pupil working together from nature. The artist says, "your sky is a little too heavy for the advantage of the landscape below;" the pupil replies, "I am not answerable for the sky, it was *there*." What, after such a defence, would be the master's most fitting rejoinder? It would be something of this kind. He would say—"Well, as a simple piece of imitation it may pass, since you tell me that the sky was there, but it would be well for you to begin to exercise your judgment as an artist, and if this were a picture, instead of a mere memorandum, you would be fully answerable for the sky, and for everything else, whether it was there in nature or not."

Mr. Ruskin is not alone in the belief that it is possible for an artist to relieve himself from all the higher artistic responsibilities, on the plea that what he has represented is a fact. It is a prevalent national error to believe this, and to think that the test of truth is final.\* It is *not* final. The essence of art is not to copy arrangements which actually exist, but to make more admirable arrangements of its own. When the sky does not suit the landscape (which very often happens),

\* I well remember being in the studio of an artist in London when a picture by a younger painter was shown to me, and I criticised it on the ground that a sharply-defined patch of very vivid green grass was injurious to the balance of colour. "I am not answerable for the grass," said the painter, "it was *there*." Then the elder artist said "Would you have him alter nature?" Neither of them seemed to be aware that an artist could be expected to exercise generalship over his material. They seemed to think that if I did not acknowledge the infallibility of nature it must be in deference to some conventional rule, and they said that, in their opinion, nature was a better authority than conventionalism. Now what I advocate is not authoritative conventionalism, but the *use of the mind* in art, the exercise of the artist's own judgment, of his own taste and good sense, in selection, omission, emphasis, all in his original way, without reference to any conventional rules whatever. The one thing which seems to me essentially unartistic is the abdication of imperial faculties in order to bind down eye and hand to the servile copyism of matter.





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imperfect execution of the plates." "Desiring merely to make them illustrative of my meaning, I have sometimes very completely failed even of that humble aim ; and the text, being generally written before the illustration was completed, sometimes naively describes as sublime or beautiful features which the plate represents by a blot." The sincerity of this self-criticism was proved later by the withdrawal of these etchings from the work, and the substitution for them of engravings from drawings by the author.

The plain truth appears to be that the soft-ground process involves just the same difficulty of biting as the point process, whilst there is an additional uncertainty about laying the copper bare to the exact degree which the artist desires, hence the liability to "blot," and rebiting is more difficult than in line etching, if indeed it is not altogether impossible. Nor is there anything in the result which is positively superior to lithography, except a mere matter of convenience in getting rid of the weight and fragility of lithographic stones, a convenience which is counterbalanced by the greater cheapness of lithographic printing. For these reasons I intend to say no more about soft-ground etching in this volume, except that if the reader wishes to study it more thoroughly, he will find examples of it in Cotman's works.\*

Mr. Ruskin's work with the point in the ordinary ground is either from studies of his own or after Turner. It is always delicate in drawing, but intentionally very simple in the biting, and, therefore, in comparison with the powerful and complex work of the best professional etchers, it is elementary. The

\* Soft-ground etching is one of those processes which appear extremely easy when you read a description of them, but which are treacherous and difficult in reality. You have nothing to do but draw with a pencil, remove your paper, and bite. This is the technical theory, but in practice we find that details are often muddled together, that intended gradations are often either spoiled or wholly absent, and that weights of tone often come in wrong relations in the biting. The process gives wonderful texture, however, sometimes, and for certain things, and a quality in some shades not unlike the good quality of the new *photogravure*.



reader may study it with advantage for the extreme truth of its forms and the accurate observation, whether of nature or of art, which is proved by the choice of line and of shade. If Mr. Ruskin has not gone farther in the direction of complete chiaroscuro, we know that it is because he cares too much for truth of light and shade to trust anything elaborate to so hazardous a means of engraving as the acid bath. When he wants a chiaroscuro study to be reproduced in its full strength, he does not etch it, but has it engraved by Mr. Armytage or Mr. Lupton. The wisdom of this is beyond dispute, yet it is not always necessary that art should be faultless in execution in order to produce its impression upon the mind. The imperfect etchings in the *Seven Lamps* are of themselves a sufficient proof of this. Their imperfection is seen at once, and as quickly forgiven—forgiven for the sake of the life and feeling which make them precious in spite of it. What does it matter that some details should be blotted here and there, some shades bitten too much or too little, when the result is that ideas of nobleness or power are, if not quite accurately expressed, at least very vividly suggested?

*Capital from the lower arcade of the Doge's Palace, Venice.—* When the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* was published many years ago, I knew little about any fine art, and less perhaps of etching than of others which came habitually in my way; but this capital from the Doge's palace, from its magnificent depth of shadow and the imaginative grandeur of its foliage and birds, always had a singular attraction for me, and increased my enjoyment of Gothic capitals generally. It is rather a note of shadows than a study of forms, but the forms themselves owe half their grandeur to the shadows they cast. The loss of detail in the shadows is not entirely defensible, because there are generally reflections strong enough to show more detail than is visible here; but the hints and suggestions in this etching have a stronger effect upon the imagination



than work more completely made out, and it is to be accounted a merit that whatever else is lost the artistic aspect is always preserved, or at least its preservation has been the etcher's principal aim. The first springing of the massive mouldings above the capital suggests the weight of the entire arch ; and though the system of light and shade resembles too closely that of photography, there is a life in the marking of the wild foliage and quaint long-beaked storks which photography would not have given, for it is not wholly attributable to him who carved the stone : the stone-cutter left, no doubt, the lines of that cornice more simply mechanical than we see them here, and for the picturesque charm of its now broken and various surface we have to thank the artistic feeling of the etcher. A classical designer neither could nor would draw architecture in this way, because if a line had been straight at first he would restore its straightness and draw it rigidly with a ruler, ignoring accident and decay. Mr. Ruskin's opposition to the classical spirit has been rather artistic than philosophical ; but a man who aspires to be an etcher can scarcely hate classicism too ardently, and a single piece of cornice drawn mechanically, like the Roman Gate of Autun in the " Saint Symphorien " of Ingres, would go farther to ruin an etching than any of the technical imperfections in this.

*Part of the Cathedral of Saint Lo, Normandy.*—An arch with small statues under canopies, above it a light gable filled with tracery and decorated with crockets, terminating in a finial. Behind this gable is a light gallery of tracery, at the angles of which are pinnacles. There are several defective and weak parts in this etching, but it is delightful for a pathetic fidelity. Observe how every fragment of the beautiful broken foliage between the crockets is noticed and recorded, and how entirely free is the etcher from any temptation to restore the fragments which are lost. When a stone is so far decayed that the sharp lines of its sculpture are all gone, the





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white and dark marble of the arch, which is of precisely the same force on both ; but there are valuable gradations in the sculptured mouldings, and much interesting variety of line. The light on the wall behind the arcade, between the columns under the shadow of the arch, is the best bit of illumination in the whole plate.

*Pass of Faïdo. Simple topography.*—An etching in few lines, without any indication of light-and-shade, having for its unique purpose the clear expression of the truth about mountain form. The principal exercise of the mind in such work as this lies in the selection of those lines which are most expressive of structure. This is a kind of drawing which would be very useful to men of science if they could do anything so truthful, which by some strange fatality they never can. As I look at it, I think what a pity it is that De Saussure, for example, had not been trained to work of this kind, instead of being dependent upon the feeble draughtsmanship of his assistants and the miserable engravers who reproduced their drawings. The means used here are as simple as they possibly can be. The main lines are given, and a few markings, that is all. There is no modelling and no illumination. Local colour also is omitted. Yet with all these omissions such is the explanatory power of the line that the mountain forms are made plain to us.

For a scientific purpose, this kind of etching may be most useful, but it cannot be practised by an artist without danger. It is perilous for him, because in doing it he would no longer see all the elements of landscape effect simultaneously, and give a *résumé* of the whole, but would look only for the outline and certain markings which exhibit construction, so becoming blind to many other things which it concerns him equally to observe. In a word, this etching is an example of abstraction, and abstraction of a kind which is rather scientific than artistic.

There is a strong temptation to draw mountains on these



principles from nature, because it is the only kind of *deliberate* drawing which can be done from nature amongst mountain-scenery at all. If you study such scenery in light and shade or in colour, your memoranda must be so rapid as to miss the delicacy of the forms.

*Crests of La Côte and Taconay.*—A study of the same kind as the preceding, but much more beautiful, on account of the indescribable grace of the natural lines, which the artist may have slightly exaggerated in his love for them. As an etched study this is the most perfect thing of its kind I ever met with. I doubt whether there is an artist living in England who can draw mountains with Mr. Ruskin's knowledge of structure and his lively sense of beauty, and I feel confident that there is nobody out of England who can. We know, however, what a price has been paid for this knowledge, how many seasons of patient labour amongst the Alps, what long self-discipline in observation, and in the art of recording observation.\* Few can appreciate the veracity of such drawing; no one can value it as it deserves to be valued who has not given many a day to labours of the same order in some noble mountain-land.

\* I should have been glad to speak of some plates done after Turner, but cannot do so in this place on account of my rule (a very necessary one) to confine myself to original work. The only exception to this rule will be a chapter on etching from pictures.



## CHAPTER V.

### *WHISTLER.*

**J**AMES WHISTLER is of American extraction, and studied painting in France in the studio of Gleyre. As a student he was capricious and irregular, and did not leave the impression amongst his fellow-pupils that his future would be in any way distinguished. He never entirely submitted to the French academical discipline, and his artistic education, like that of many English artists, seems to have been mainly acquired by private and independent study.

As an artist who by this time has fully expressed at least his tendencies, Whistler may be fairly estimated now. He has very rare and very peculiar endowments, and may in a certain sense be called great,—that is, so far as greatness may be understood of faculties which are rather remarkable for keenness and originality than range. The faculties which he has are pre-eminently of the artistic order ; he is essentially a painter and etcher, not a dramatist or poet ; he is never literary, but always pictorial. And in his pictures and etchings it is the most artistic points that interest him most—not so much the natural material as what may be done with it. His oil-pictures are experiments in colour-harmonies, and his etchings are notes of strange concurrences of line. Whether he really loves anything I have never been able to determine, but he has a predilection for the wharves of the Thames, which, in a warmer temperament, would have grown into a strong affection. Whistler





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may not occasionally be selected as a motive. Art is so large, that it may express not only unity and repose, but restlessness and confusion. In many of Whistler's etchings the eye has no peace, and cannot find a space of tranquil light or quiet shade; but after long familiarity with the art that illustrates unity and repose, we find refreshment in this very carelessness of unity, and even, if such a paradox may be pardoned, a unity in their scattering and an aim in their aimlessness.

Mr. Whistler has published a set of his plates since the first edition of this work appeared.\* Let me especially recommend the Hungerford Bridge (for exquisite delicacy of

\* It is unfortunate, I think, that etchings like those of Mr. Whistler and Mr. Haden should be published at such a very high price and in such a small edition. Money was certainly not the object in either of these cases; the real object in charging twelve or sixteen guineas for a few etchings is to convey the impression to the public mind that they are very precious things, and it is certain that if the etchings were published at a moderate price there is a class of collectors who would cease to value them; such is human nature. But, on the other hand, it is a misfortune for the celebrity of the etcher that so few copies of his works should be in the possession of those who really care about the art for itself, and who do not estimate the quality of a drawing by the sum of money which was paid for it. A hundred copies of a publication can do but little for the fame of its author, a thousand might do something. In literature we find that it is possible to sell books by thousands without acquiring thereby any inconvenient degree of celebrity, and we also find that cheap editions do not degrade books, but the contrary. A reasonable way of publishing etchings is that adopted by Mr. Sijthoff of Leyden for Unger's works, the price being £1 : 7s. for the set of ten, mounted on boards. A still cheaper and quite practicable system is that of M. Cadart, who issues an annual portfolio at £2, containing forty etchings well printed on good Dutch paper, but not mounted. Etchings cannot be decently issued independently for less than this, but it is relatively a popular form answering to cheap editions in literature. The *Portfolio* gives an etching every month for half-a-crown, besides two other full-page illustrations and a quantity of text. I have an especial dislike to the system of publishing very limited editions, and then destroying the plates to create a small demand for the proofs as rarities. The greatest care should be taken not to publish a single proof after the plate shows signs of wear, but until then why not let everybody buy a copy who wants one? I am particularly vexed with M. de Gravesande for having destroyed some plates of his mentioned in this volume when only a hundred copies had been printed. One feels that it is almost useless to write about things which can be in the hands of so very few people.



curve) ; the little girl leaning against a door-post in France, a woman inside the house cooking ; a boy seated, and holding his foot (dry-point), hat on the floor, dress of black velvet ; and the three subjects which follow.

*Wapping-Wharf.*—The reader may know this etching by the following indications. There is a house with bow-windows to the right, and three common windows above. Over these is a sign with the words, “Thames Police ;” a second house bears the inscription, “Wapping-Wharf.” The shores of the Thames in London used to be picturesque, and the new embankment will remove much material that is interesting to artists ; but the picturesque of the London river is after all nothing but a more entertaining variety of the universal London ugliness. The Thames is beautiful from Maidenhead to Kew, but not from Battersea to Sheerness. If beauty were the only province of art, neither painters nor etchers would find anything to occupy them in the foul stream that washes the London wharfs ; but even ugliness itself may be valuable if only it has sufficient human interest and fortuitous variety of lines. The long brick streets, whose regularity charms the least artistic section of the public, are as ugly as Wapping Wharf, but they are not so available for etching, because they have nothing accidental and unforeseen. A subject like this is not only picturesque, but very quaint and curious, full of all sorts of odd bits of detail that come together in a strange way that amuses and occupies the spectator. It takes some time to analyse any of Whistler’s more complicated river subjects, and we have a pleasure in the occupation, which is much enhanced by the singular skill of the designer. In this particular etching attention may be directed to the delicacy of work on the principal roof, and to the rapid but subtle sketching of the barges and wherry in the foreground.

*Black Lion Wharf.*—I take this as a representative



example of Whistler's peculiar qualities and faults; the faults being, as so often happens in art, inseparable from the qualities, and not so much to be condemned as simply stated, to prevent them from having an influence which might become widely and permanently injurious. It is one of the Thames wharfs seen across the water; in the foreground we have a man sitting in a barge, his arm resting on the gunwale. Near the shore is a schooner, a barge full of barrels, one or two other boats, a landing-stage, a crane, several houses, and two large warehouses, one with a long chimney. The roofs, as usual, are studied with the utmost minuteness, and no detail of window or balcony is missed. The schooner is very finely indicated, but the foreground is slight in the extreme, and is altogether out of relation to the rest of the subject. The artist has exhausted all his darks in the details of the shore: the blacks in a single bow-window beyond the schooner have got down already to the very bottom of the scale; and as nothing in an etching can be made blacker than pure printer's ink, the artist has no resource left for his foreground, and so sketches it without attempting any statement of its relation to that bow-window. But if we concentrate our attention, as Whistler did, upon the buildings, our study will be amply rewarded. Though the work is very careful, it is by no means slavish, and differs from the careful work of bad etchers more by keenness of observation and vivacity of handling, than by any disdain for small facts. If there is composition, it is so consummate as to be undiscoverable; but the very absence of it increases the appearance of jumble which is so characteristic of the London wharfs. Houses built without a plan, and figures who do not trouble themselves about the rules of art, are the materials that Whistler has sought: disorder and confusion are the law of their visible existence, and not confusion of the sort which in art is the most orderly arrangement; and as the absence of composition only helps the expression of





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## CHAPTER VI.

### *HADEN.*

**F**RANCIS SEYMOUR HADEN is a London surgeon in large practice, devoted to his profession, which he pursues actively.

Francis Seymour Haden is an artist of rare endowment and consummate practical skill.

These two statements may seem incompatible, but they are both true. When a surgeon or other professional gentleman outside of art reads this, he will wonder how it can be possible that a practical surgeon can be also a practical artist; he may even go a step farther, and decide in his own mind that it is not possible. However, whether possible or not, it is a fact. So, when an artist who has not seen Haden's etchings, hears that he is a doctor and an amateur, he may feel certain that the etchings cannot be worth much; but then the undeniable fact is that they *are* worth much, that they are worth more than professional work generally, and that it is difficult to find work of the same technical quality amongst the productions of contemporary artists, either in England or out of England.

This success of Mr. Haden as an artist—a success which is not due to any temporary fashion, but will be as permanent as any other modern reputation of equal present importance—is the most interesting fact which can be adduced in reference to the great question of amateurship, and it is worth while to consider how far Mr. Haden's position resembles that of other amateurs generally, and what hope of a like success they may reasonably entertain.



It is true that etching has been Mr. Haden's recreation, and not the business of his life ; but drawing, which is the foundation of etching, was employed by him as an auxiliary in the study of anatomy, and men of great energy often carry a spirit of resolution into their amusements, and a determination to do what they undertake as well as they possibly can, even when they have no intention of earning money by it. The kind of recreation which Mr. Haden has sought in art was not pastime, but diversion—not a way of passing time agreeably, so much as something to divert great energies from their usual channel. He would never have been an etcher at all, if he had always regularly enjoyed the perfect health necessary to uninterrupted professional work ; but though his constitution is robust, there was a time, some years ago, when its powers were so much overtaxed that a very long rest was considered necessary, and during this time of rest Mr. Haden produced the etchings that we know. Since then his health has been re-established, the practice of medicine resumed, and etching all but abandoned. The production of an etching is too serious and difficult a matter to be undertaken when the mind is preoccupied by other interests ; and though it may require few hours to etch a plate, these hours must be preceded by other hours of uninterrupted tranquillity, and there must be no anxiety about work to be done, or appointments to be kept, just when the plate is finished. An active surgeon or lawyer, however true might be his natural gift as an artist, however consummate his acquired facility, could not, in short intervals stolen from his profession, get himself sufficiently into the artistic frame of mind for the production of good work. The reader would therefore greatly mistake the conditions under which Mr. Haden's etchings were achieved, if he supposed that the artist executed his plates during the intervals of consultations. Though a surgeon by profession, he had been compelled against his will to abandon



medicine temporarily, and sought occupation in etching ; living, for the time, the life of an artist, and purposely detaching his mind as much as possible from professional cares and thoughts. That Mr. Haden has by nature a very powerful and original artistic faculty I have no doubt, but it is not so certain that he is naturally more artist than surgeon, or that we ought to regret the devotion of his life to a career outside of art. There are instances of men who are in professions which they dislike, and who seek in music or painting, often also in the more attractive kinds of literary work, a relief from the tedium of uncongenial duties. But the case of Mr. Haden is so far from being one of these, that he is devotedly attached to his profession, and quitted it for art only that he might return to it later with re-invigorated energies. He had long possessed a rich collection of etchings, and the example of Whistler induced him to make a practical attempt. The result was so far satisfactory as to be an encouragement to perseverance, and Mr. Haden found in etching the patience to endure a temporary pause in the career of his serious ambition. Whilst etching the plates which have won for him artistic fame, Mr. Haden had no idea of showing his work to the public ; he did it for his own health and delight, and neither for our pleasure nor our praise.

This last fact brings me to a consideration which is favourable to the chances of amateurs. Artists who work for money and reputation are obliged to consult the market, to think whether their work is likely to suit the taste which, for the time being, is prevalent ; and this often leads them to much embarrassment and hesitation, and cramps their true genius. They are like speakers on a platform : they have to adapt themselves to an audience, and their success seems to depend as much upon their knowledge of the public as upon their knowledge of art. In saying this, I am not speaking vaguely, but have living instances before me ;





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How the skill came to him is still, after all explanations, a mystery. No one ever before was able to do work of equal quality after so little manual practice. The anatomical drawing laid a foundation, and perhaps the manual precision necessary in dissection, and still more in operations on the living subject, may have developed a natural capacity to apprehend form : but what is so curious is that the etchings show no trace of a *dominant* sense of mere construction ; that the scientific element is entirely subordinated to the artistic impression, and this to such a degree that there is no obtrusive display of structural knowledge, even where it was fully possessed, and the figures hold their places as true landscape-figures, when any other anatomist would have become pedantic about muscles and bones. The structure of trees is always powerfully rendered, and, whether in foliage, or branch, or stem, the draughtsmanship is equal to that of any contemporary landscape-painter ; but even here there is no pedantry of science or system, and the trees are drawn quite freely and innocently, as if the artist knew them only by the intense gaze of a simple lover of nature. This entire subordination of science to art, in a man scientifically educated, is a proof of immense natural spring and elasticity in the artistic faculty itself. A never-ending subject of wonder to me in Haden's work is that it is not only art, but *pure* art,—art reigning unopposed in its own realm ; and that the scientific training of the workman has not power to embarrass him, but is easily laid aside, as the old knights laid aside their stiff plate-armour to take their ease in robes of pliant silk.

This etcher has had much against him : the constant application of energy to other objects, the direction of attention to studies of a different order ; but one thing in his hard professional life has been favourable,—he has learned what it is to observe and what it is to work. The miserable failure of the mass of amateurs is due not so much to their



having other work, as to their having *no* work, to their lamentable ignorance of the nature of work generally. When men have not some great pursuit, they abandon culture when they leave school, and (as a distinguished living poet said to me in a letter) "content themselves with the current enlightenment of the epoch." But Mr. Haden has had for his main pursuit one of the noblest and most stimulating of all studies, so that he has never lost the habit of acquisition.

Of his place and rank among etchers it may be necessary now to speak. He is frankly a pupil of Rembrandt, but so thoroughly modern that tradition never stands between him and nature. Haden has nothing whatever in common with the English school of etching, and is only mentioned in this place because he happens to be an Englishman, not as a member of the school. His manner is so entirely in harmony with the nature of the art, that no man's work, except Rembrandt's, is a safer example in this respect. There is never, in an etching by Haden, that uncomfortable fatigue which wearies us so frequently in modern work; he never even wishes to transgress the limits of the art, but works happily within them, as a sea-captain commands his own ship. Consequently, he never imitates engraving, or betrays a hankering after other methods, or wants etching to do more than it naturally can do. As every quality has its corresponding fault, it may be added, however, that Mr. Haden is so rapid and decided in manner, that he misses, by his very decision, the charm of a certain rare and precious and exquisite *indecision* which one or two first-rate men have had, and which is the last result of art. His temper is rather active and rapidly intuitive, than quietly contemplative; and though his etchings prove that he is capable of reverie and rest, he is so only at rare moments, his general habit being emphatic and decisive. Of his imaginative power, there is only evidence of this kind, that he turns what he sees into something interesting and good; but what he



could do without nature or sketches, I am unable to say. It is certain that he is not a literalist, not a prosaic workman; and though the imaginative faculty in this case may not be strong enough to be relied upon without reference to nature, it is certainly strong enough to transform and interpret nature.

Of the kind of material made use of by this artist, it may be observed, first, that he is a master of foliage, that he has drawn some trees magnificently, both as to wood and leaves; there is no better stem or branch drawing than his in all contemporary art. He draws boats and buildings well, and water in the common varieties of calm and ripple, but he does not seem to have attempted the sea-waves. He draws land with great truth, especially pieces of river-bank, but apparently does not possess any especial knowledge of mountain structure or mountain effects. So his cloud studies are confined to what may be seen in the lowlands. An etcher having Haden's technical power, and perfect leisure for some years, might do great and new things in mountainous countries, if he had the right passion for their sublimities. These victories are reserved for the future; mountains have been painted, but never etched.\*

*Out of Study window.*—The sky here may be a useful example to etchers, as much for the prudence of the artist as his courage. He has done those things which he ought to have done, and he has also left undone those things which he ought not to have done. This negative side of duty is, for clever and accomplished artists, perhaps the more difficult of the two. With the single exception of Whistler, there is not another etcher in England who would not have killed this sky in trying to finish it.† These masses of heavy

\* Except scientifically by Mr. Ruskin, as we have seen, and slightly by Turner as a preparation for mezzotint.

† This was true when written, but I think that Mr. Chattock would now etch such a sky rightly if it came in his way.





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fact shadows in the misty air—all these things, and the undulating lines which mark the flow of the rippling river, are expressional expedients, which no simple imitator could ever discover or apply. He might scrawl as wildly and scratch as faintly, but it would not be the right scrawling and scratching, and he might leave great spaces of white paper like that in the upper sky, but he could not flood it with this ethereal fire.

*Whistler's House at Old Chelsea.*—It would have been interesting to future students of etching, if Mr. Haden had informed us which of these houses is inhabited by the great etcher of the Thames. He has been kind enough to let us know where Mr. Greaves, the boat-builder, carries on his very useful occupation, but the Thames has had many boat-builders and only one Whistler. There is magnificent power of drawing in this etching, and brilliant arrangement of lights and darks. The foreshortening of the bows of the barges, as seen from the sterns, is as good a piece of work as one might hope to find in the Royal Academy, and there is not a marine painter living who would have drawn these barges better. Their immense force as darks gives great delicacy to the bridge, and the light foliage beyond it; and their cumbrous weight as a united mass adds greatly to the thread-like tenuity of the rigging in the distance. Of the figures in the foreground, it is fair to say that they are neither better nor worse than Turner's. We have a woman in a state of much distress because three little dogs are running after her, and she displays her legs in a manner so pathetic as to excite the sympathy of everybody but those two watermen with the poles, one of whom seems rather amused at the incident. Both woman and watermen are in a high degree Turnerian; that is, they are true landscape-painter's figures, not to be judged in themselves, but with reference to the houses and boats they accompany. Rude as they are, they give life



to the scene, and their execution is in harmony with that of the inanimate objects about them.

*The Towing-path.*—A sketch in dry-point, with a rather high horizon and somewhat empty foreground, on which a lady is walking with a Skye-terrier. It is a river scene, where the stream is divided by an island. This island and both shores are enriched with foliage which is reflected in the glassy water. There is some undulation towards the foreground, but it is smooth and bright, and reflects the sky.

When persons, not much accustomed to etching, come across a dry-point, they are always very much taken by its softness ; but if the tones of dry-point are richer, its lines are poorer than the etched line. In pure etching, Mr. Haden would have drawn better poplars than these, and the other trees would have had more variety and richer detail. The best work here is not in the trees, nor in the sky, but the water. The reflection of the central mass on the island is as soft and limpid as we may desire. When water is not so absolutely still as to become a mirror, but yet sufficiently smooth to reflect softly, it can be rendered as well with the dry-point as any other instrument, for the lines needed are all either straight lines, vertical, or horizontal, or else the gentlest curves. The rich quality of dry-point work gives the softness of such reflections perfectly.

*A Sunset in Tipperary.*—If the reader cares to compare the powers of etching and dry-point, he may place this dry-point side by side with the etching of part of the same subject which appeared in the *Fine Arts Quarterly Review*.\* The difference is altogether in favour of dry-point if richness of tone is the quality sought, and just as favourable to etching if we value variety of line. Much will depend on the particular impression to which the reader may have access. The one before me is so clogged with ink that the signature is a

\* See *Fine Arts Quarterly Review*, No. 3, New Series, January 1867, p. 119.



blot, and the nearer trees a mass of undistinguishable dark. But I remember other impressions printed less heavily, in which all the richness of the subject was preserved without this excessive confusion. To judge a dry-point fairly, we must be past the stage in which its softness strikes and captivates us, for this softness is merely a necessary property in the process, and does not of itself imply merit in the executant. The scene here is one of those charming glimpses of river, where the stream reflects the sky before it hides itself again under the dark woods. It is evening, and the time seems later than sunset; the copy before me might pass for late twilight, so lost are the details in the inky depths of shade. Landscape art is often dear to us from its connection with healthy pleasures and agreeable reminiscences. Let us suppose, that we may the better enjoy this plate, that we have descended the river so far in a canoe, and are pausing here whilst the sun sets beyond the dark forest. It must, of course, be a river wholly unknown to us, and we ought to feel a little anxiety and apprehension about our twilight course through those solemn woods.

*Shere Mill-pond, Surrey.*—The preparation for this volume has compelled me to examine all the most notable etchings which have been produced since the invention of the art. In the course of these studies, I have looked over several thousand plates, and, having selected two or three hundred of the best, weighed their relative merits with the most scrupulous care. The reader will, therefore, do me the justice to believe that any expression of opinion to which I commit myself has been preceded by long deliberation. It is easy to blame; and censure has always this element of safety, that there is imperfection or at least limitation, in all human endeavour, and that he who discovers faults places himself on a judicial seat, whilst humble admiration implies some acknowledgment of inferiority. A great critic of literature observed to me, that it needed courage to praise without





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may be almost counted, and whose trunk may be grasped with the hand. But all these things are obvious, and may be easily expressed in words ; that which is not so obvious nor so easily written about, is the subtle play of soft gradations like the modulations of tenderest music ; the passage from all that is richest and fullest to all that is thinnest and clearest, a transition managed without abruptness, without violence, yet passing from extreme to extreme.

*House of Benjamin Davis, Smith (Newcastle-in-Emlyn, South Wales).*—This may be taken as fairly representative of Mr. Haden's sketches on copper. A sketch of this kind may be easily done in three hours, if the artist is clever enough to do it at all, and it may be done as conveniently in the acid bath as out of it. Mr. Haden has a way of leaving large white spaces in his foreground, so that sometimes his compositions do not seem solidly based ; but the advantage of a white space is undeniable when there is a fair excuse for leaving one ; it affords repose to the eye, and gives by contrast a value to the blacks, and consequently a brilliance to the whole work, which are not otherwise so easily attainable. These plates at one sitting have an advantage on the score of freshness, but they can scarcely be either rich in detail or complete in tonality, and when good they are rather of the nature of artistic memoranda, than works of deliberate purpose. In this case, although the vehicles cast shadows, and the house is in full light, there is a curious absence of illumination on the foliage, and the plate has a confused look which is not altogether satisfactory.

*Early Morning in Richmond Park.*—There is a faint little inscription in dry-point to the left of the plate, from one of the songs of Shakspeare, "The lark at heaven's gate sings," and in the space of perfectly white paper, which is here made to represent the bright early sky, the bird is faintly visible. This poetical quotation may have been added when the plate was retouched, for there is abundant dry-point work,



and a roughening of the copper on the foliage, which indicate labours subsequent to those with the needle. But whether the quotation occurred to the artist in the presence of nature, or not, the conception of the plate itself has a poetry of its own, and it is filled with the freshness of morning. The contrast of light and dark on the trunks of the great trees is somewhat violent and excessive, and would not stand the test, the one true test of tonality, of translation into colour. If a painter took this etching and tried to make a picture from it, he could not preserve this violence of contrast, for he could not paint his tree with pure flake white on the side where the sun strikes it, and pure ivory black on the other. There is a sooty heaviness in these shades which really injures the effect whilst apparently adding to its force; but the trunks are drawn with perfect knowledge of their structure, and a masterly indication of bark. There is a little tree on the lower land, the summit of whose foliage is caught by the sunshine, and as it were, burnt by it in a glitter of silvery flame as light as the white sky itself. This is an exaggeration, but a permissible one, for it helps the expression of splendour. There is an unaccountable *salissure* to the left under the sun, which, whatever it may have been intended to mean, expresses no object or appearance of objects visible in distant landscape; but though the plate has obvious defects, it has the one great merit, which in etching makes almost any defect pardonable, the unity of a genuine impression.

*Battersea Reach.*—The same feeling which suggested the introduction of the lark in the preceding subject has suggested the balloon in this; it helps to give the sense of space and air, and reminds us that the white paper there is not to be paper for us, but atmosphere. Mr. Haden's love for large white spaces was never more strikingly manifested than in the last or published state of this etching. In the earlier state the river was crowded with boats, but now these have been removed wherever it reflects the sky, and a vast bright



surface is left unbroken, a surface so bright that it is out of relation to the actual whiteness of the sky, which we must fancy a little brighter still. The massive sketching of the buildings on the opposite shore adds, by its extreme solidity, to the curious appearance of suspension between two voids. This crowded shore, with its houses and prisons of stone, seems to hang like a planet in the pure ether, or the Island of Laputa in the air. This idea is the artistic motive of the work, and the strange charm of the etching may be due to a vague sense of the unexpressed analogy between these substantial buildings of Battersea suspended between two infinities, and resting apparently upon nothing, and the stern prose of the life of man between the two eternities.

*The Agamemnon*.\*—The plate measures 16 in. by 7½ in. It is drawn upon to the edges. There is no margin on the copper. Thus the plate-mark coincides with the edges of the drawing, and there are no ruled lines. I think that it is wise to arrange etchings in this way generally, because the ruled lines are in too strong contrast with the liberty of the etched ones, and the simple plate-mark is less formal. At the same

\* This etching is not included in the portfolio which contains the plates hitherto enumerated. It was published separately and more recently. No etching ever published has been so successful, indeed the profits which it realised immediately were so great as to equal the price of a first-rate picture in the Academy, whilst if the time spent is considered, there have not been more than three or four painters who have ever earned so much in so few hours. Far indeed, however, from ideas of money-getting was the mind of the artist when he set about his task. He had abandoned etching on account of professional duties, and it was I who induced him to resume the point. I had just founded the *Portfolio*, and begged Mr. Haden to etch a plate for the young periodical on our usual terms, suggesting that the money might be handed over to some charity. He accepted, and was glad to earn something in this way for the hospital he has founded. With this view he went to etch the *Agamemnon*, taking the copper with him and working directly from nature, but the copper was too big for the *Portfolio*, so it was decided he should do something else for us and publish the *Agamemnon* plate separately. This was very fortunate, as it turned out, for it is quite possible that if the plate had appeared in a periodical it might have attracted less attention, whereas, having strength to stand alone, its importance was fully recognised.





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# PLATE XI.

(To be placed opposite page 308.)

Part of the plate known as "THE AGAMEMNON."

By F. Seymour Haden.

*Copied by the Author.*

This includes a very small portion of Mr. Haden's large plate, and does not give any of his deepest foreground bitings. The importance of the cloud markings in the sky can scarcely be understood without reference to the entire sky in the original. The sun, in this fragment, necessarily appears exaggerated in size, and the buildings in the distance look more carelessly drawn than they do in the original, because of their greater relative importance in this small fragment.

## BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
The palest lines about sun, sky, distance, and water . . . . .	7
Darker lines in distance . . . . .	12
Domes and buildings of Greenwich . . . . .	17
Dreadnought (hulk to left) and sail of barge and distant vessel, also some ripple in water, and some of the lighter touches on Agamemnon . . . . .	25
The Agamemnon (prow to the right) . . . . .	45
Portion of barge in right-hand corner and foreground ripple . . . . .	65

First proof taken.

Plate prepared for rebiting.

The portions rebitten were the domes and buildings of Greenwich (except those behind the barge with the dark sprit-sail) also the Dreadnought and sail of the barge, and the anchor of the Agamemnon. They were rebitten for eight minutes.

Second proof taken.

Faint lines now added with the dry-point, or else obtained by reducing with the scraper and burnisher some of those which had bitten seven minutes. The Dreadnought is shaded with the burn over the etched lines. The lower part of the Agamemnon, near the water, is shaded with dry-point. So is the buoy. Some lines in the Agamemnon are deepened with the burin, others are reduced with the scraper.

This plate is printed as follows :—The whole is first wiped with the canvas only (not the hand) and then the stern of the Dreadnought, the ripple and portion of barge in the immediate foreground, and part of the Agamemnon, are *retroussés*.













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time the slight depression of the etched surface is good and assists the effect, making the margin like the frame to a picture, and when ribbed or rough paper is employed the etched surface alone is made smooth by pressure, whereas when there is a copper margin the paper is smooth also between the etching and the plate-mark. In the latter case the formality of ruled lines is now frequently avoided by letting the etched work of the drawing come up to an imaginary line rather irregularly.

The sentiment of this etching is very like that of Turner's well-known picture, the *Téméraire*. In the picture an old war-ship of the heroic time is being towed to her last berth, there to be broken up like a rotten cask; in the etching another such old war-ship has actually arrived at her last berth, and the destroyers are already at work upon her. If there is any sight in the world which can touch the heart of an Englishman, it is this. Until now the ship has been alive still, though superseded by later models, but now an official decision has pronounced her to be dead, and sentenced her to dissolution. She floats yet, and there are men in her, but they are doing exactly the same work as the worms in a dead war-horse. They have destroyed a good deal already. Every mast and every spar is gone except the mizzen and the flag-staff at the stern, and even that mizzen is bared of its shrouds. From figure-head to taffrail the bulwarks are cleared away, and the timbers stand up like a shattered battlement, showing the sky between them. As the planking is gradually torn off it will bare the ribs from deck to deck down to the water's edge. But this is not to be done to-day, so we may look at those long rows of port-holes till the sun is down. No more battle-thunder will ever come out of them, they are nothing now but so many windows without glass, and provided with uncommonly thick shutters, some closed, some partially lifted up. Now let us use our imaginations a little and see the old ship as she was in the day of battle



with all her sails set, gliding swiftly and steadily towards the enemy's line, silent as a charged thunder-cloud before the lightning flashes. Not until she gets very near will she break that ominous silence. Then suddenly half her port-holes open together, half her guns thrust out their deadly muzzles, a tongue of red flame leaps out from each, followed by a long puff of smoke, and then comes such a roar! Crash go the flying balls into the enemy!—Well, we have all read such descriptions, and we all remember how,

With thunders from her native oak  
She quells the floods below,—  
As they roar on the shore,  
When the stormy winds do blow ;  
When the battle rages loud and long,  
And the stormy winds do blow.

Perhaps these very lines may have been ringing in the etcher's memory when he sat down to his task, certainly the sentiments and recollections I have just expressed were his. The *Agamemnon* was not to him merely a floating wooden thing of rather a picturesque shape, nor was that figure-head, with its British-Greek helmet and crest, merely a reference to the war in Troy, for the wooden Agamemnon had been in sublimer battle than any Grecian leader.

With such a subject as this for a motive, an etcher will do manly work if the strength to do it is in him. And this is manly work. I know very well the sort of criticism which would be applied to this etching by a critic who had recently acquired some knowledge of light and shade, and felt proud of his acquirement. He would say, "With the sun in that position many parts which are left white in the etching would be strongly shaded, for example the figure-head, fish-davit, and dead-wood about it ought not to have been left white against that luminous sky, for they would have come dark against it. The barge in the foreground in the left-hand corner ought to have had its side very darkly





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supposes, of course, a certain willing activity of sympathetic imagination in the spectator, and also some intelligence. Art of this kind certainly does not address itself to the stupid portion of mankind, who would do well to keep out of its way. It is taken for granted that when we have seen that thin circular line so simply drawn above Greenwich, we shall have memory and imagination enough of our own to see the orb of fire, that the black marks in the sky will be clouds for us, and those on the water ripples. Just on the same principle it is presumed that those parts which the etcher has thought it better not to shade will be shaded more delicately and more truly by our own awakened imagination. The most that can fairly be asked from work of this kind is that the lines in it should be first well selected and then soundly drawn. In this etching they are so.

I must ask the reader to give his attention in this place whilst I endeavour to make clear a certain property of lines which has never been critically considered. Let it be supposed that you are working, or intending to work, in pure line, that is to say, that you are using the line for outlines or suggestions of outline, and for organic markings, shading in the meantime as little as possible. You are not intending to shade, and yet your markings, in proportion to their quantity, will always inevitably be so much shading in the general effect. For example, the figure-head, fish-davit, etc., in the *Agamemnon* are not shaded at all, but only drawn organically, and yet as a certain amount of black is laid on the paper in so drawing them, the consequence is that the eye strikes an average between this black and the white spaces, so that the white spaces do not seem false until we consider them independently. And so it is with the whole side of the vessel. You may find many small spaces in it which are certainly false, taken alone, but the effect of the whole seen together at a little distance is very nearly right. This principle may appear new to some readers, and yet all



line-engraving depends upon it, for even the grey tint in the most delicate shading with the diamond does in reality represent an average that the eye strikes between spaces which are perfectly black and spaces which are perfectly white. Hence, when an artist has done much for texture in line, it is probable that he may have been shading at the same time, almost without being aware of it. The type of this volume is a kind of shading on the page, though quite unintentional, and at a little distance it will make the page look, not white and black, but grey. Now if the reader returns to the *Agamemnon* with the conviction that every black line in an etching is sure to tell as shade, he will perceive that, merely by marking things or not marking them, the artist has often suggested shade or left it unsuggested. For example, the sky is left very open about the sun, but it is much more marked with cloud-lines as the distance from the sun increases. You suspect no shading here, and there is really none of an avowed kind, but all these cloud-markings produce in the aggregate an effect of shade, and do, in fact, give a gradation. So it is with the markings for little waves upon the water; they too give graduated shade, though apparently intended to indicate only form. Again, it is perfectly true that the barge in the left-hand corner has nothing of what we call shading on its side, where it ought to be very black if the exact truth were given, but now see the subtle operation of the law just indicated. That barge has very powerfully bitten markings which make a dark mass of it as a whole, and the white spaces, though broad, are so influenced by the near neighbourhood of the black markings that the mind is not shocked by their falsity until it is pointed out, and even then speedily forgives it. Replace those deeply-bitten thick markings by pale ones, and the solecism would be at once intolerable. The plain truth is that there is hardly any intentional shading whatever in this plate; it is nearly all of it line-drawing of



definite things, and yet the drawing is so managed and so distributed as to suggest shading besides. The whole secret may be condensed into a precept. *Keep open spaces in light parts, let your lines be few there and also thin, but in darker parts you may put more and stronger markings.\** I may observe that even such things as the lines of cordage here have a very important effect in the general distribution of light and dark, though they do not look as if put there for that purpose.

There is a great deal of texture in this etching, especially in the Agamemnon—some would say too much—but it pleases me because it is explanatory of substance and structure, the direction of the lines always answering to that of the planking. What I value more, however, than any texture is the cunning selection of the most expressive lines in the flowing water, as it eddies and washes past barge, and buoy, and vessel. There is much firm good drawing too about the cordage and the crane. Stretched ropes look easier to draw than they really are, and they are seldom well done in etching. There is always a slight curve in them, except in the shrouds of a ship, which are screwed up like fiddle-strings, and even here there is a curve sometimes. An etcher generally does one of two things, either he rules the line and takes all the life out of it by so doing, or else his hand is uncertain, as Zeeman's was, and gives the curve weakly and tremulously. It is rare to find the curve of a rope drawn at once truly and decisively.

I remember that a critic, though without mentioning Mr. Haden by name, wrote something about "attitudinising with the free and frank line," in evident reference to my praise of him. Now Mr. Haden certainly does not "attitudinise" with the line, but uses it with the most unaffected simplicity of

\* This is different from M. Lalanne's precept, and also from the usual practice of engravers, who put many lines in light parts to get the effect of a grey tint. The engravers also use many dark lines for shading, even when they are intended to signify nothing else.





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## CHAPTER VII.

### *CRUIKSHANK AND DOYLE.*

**F**EW more interesting subjects could occupy a writer on art than the various and truly original genius of Cruikshank, but I cannot speak of him here with the fulness which his inventive faculty deserves, because the art of etching is, in his plates, so often subordinated to the purposes of the caricaturist, that artistic quality is hardly ever their principal aim, and it would be foreign to the design of a work of this kind to enter largely into the discussion of merits which, however deserving of honourable recognition, are often moral and intellectual rather than artistic. Art, with a great social or political purpose, is seldom pure fine art ; artistic aims are usually lost sight of in the anxiety to hit the social or political mark, and though the caricaturist may have great natural faculty for art, it has not a fair chance of cultivation. It would be a mistake, in a volume intended to strengthen the position of etching as a fine art, to direct attention to works whose interest is wholly different, for to criticise them would be an injustice to the caricaturist, and to speak much of their peculiar powers, a digression. The reader may remember the exhibition of Cruikshank's works, which took place a few years ago, at Exeter Hall. There was a large oil-painting in the room, representing the bad effects of drinking too much alcohol. Its social purpose was no doubt excellent, but it lay outside of artistic criticism, because there was no attempt at any one artistic excellence ; no arrangement of form, no light and shade, no synthesis of



colour. And so it is with very many of Cruikshank's etchings; they are full of keen satire and happy invention, and their moral purpose is always good, but all these qualities are compatible with a carelessness of art which is not to be tolerated in any one but a professed caricaturist.

There is, however, in Cruikshank, an artist within or behind the caricaturist, and this artist is a personage of exceptional endowment. His invention is vivid, and his power of drawing the figures invented is singularly sprightly and precise. There are etchings by Cruikshank, though these are not numerous in proportion to the mass of his great labours, which are as excellent artistically as they are notable for genius and wit, where the stroke of the needle is as happy as the thought, and where the student of etching may find models, as the student of manners finds a record or a suggestion. In etchings of this high class, Cruikshank carries one great virtue of the art to perfection—its simple frankness. He is so direct and unaffected, that only those who know the difficulties of etching can appreciate the power that lies behind his unpretending skill; there is never, in his most admirable plates, the trace of a vain effort.

I never regretted the hard necessity which forbids an art critic to shut his eyes to artistic shortcomings more heartily than I do now in speaking of Richard Doyle. Considered as commentaries on human character, his etchings are so full of wit and intelligence, so bright with playful satire and manly relish of life, that I scarcely know how to write sentences with a touch at once light enough and keen enough to describe them. But they are of no value as works of art; Doyle never selects a line as the great men do, and he does not seem to take the least interest in local colour or chiaroscuro. Though shading is employed to give projection to the personages, Doyle's etchings are in reality conceived only in outline, and his interpretation of nature is, when considered from the artistic point of view, so artless as to be



almost puerile. When he feebly attempts any effect of light, he is always lost, and knows it; in these cases he will frankly abandon the effect in the same etching, when it becomes inconveniently difficult. His sense of the nature of material is quite undeveloped, and he never draws any object as if he had looked at it. This absence of imitative study is not, in Doyle, due to any noble abstraction, but is mere defect of training or carelessness of art. It is probable that this artlessness is an essential element in the complex influences of his caricatures; the artistic statement is so thoroughly *naïf*, that we enjoy the satire the more, just as we laugh more heartily at a child's portrait of his papa than at the serious efforts of the scientific portrait-painter. But a critic who is anxious to obtain for etching the sort of consideration which is due to it cannot allow his readers to retain the impression that such work as this of Doyle is what he understands by "etching," and recommends as art, and it is a positive misfortune that the popular idea of what etching is capable of should be so often derived from work of this kind, the circulation of which, from its connection with successful novels, is usually much more extensive than that of artistic masterpieces. Fifty contemporary Englishmen know Doyle's illustrations of "The Newcomes" for one who remembers Wilkie's "Pope examining a Censer;" and when etching is mentioned in general society, the associations which the word calls up in the minds of the majority have less connection with the treasures of the British Museum than with the pleasant companions of our domestic leisure.

The allusion to "The Newcomes" makes it impossible for me to conclude these observations without acknowledgment of the all but inestimable dramatic value of the illustrations which accompanied it. Illustrations to imaginative literature are too frequently an intrusion and an impertinence, but these really added to our enjoyment of a great literary masterpiece, and Doyle's conception of the Colonel,





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or very ill, in the last extremity of poverty ; on the wall behind him is a placard offering fifty pounds reward. (7) A man in a fool's cap, starting at his own shadow ; there is an advertisement on the wall offering a hundred pounds reward. (8) A man running away with bags containing a hundred pounds each, and putting his foot in a trap. (9) Man bearing a log of wood, on which is inscribed, "for fourteen years ;" there is a ship in the distance. (10) Man dragging a log after him chained to his foot, and bearing upon his shoulders a coffin, on which is inscribed, "for life ;" before him is his grave with his spade sticking up in it. The sea and a ship show that he is a convict in a penal colony.

This elaborate plate is as good an example as could be chosen of Cruikshank's moral teaching. Its lesson, like those of Hogarth, is made as direct and obvious as possible, and even repeated under various different forms. The moral is too coarse and palpable to be quite satisfactory to a very thoughtful observer ; great criminals are not always fools, if folly is only to be measured by the troubles into which it brings itself ; but the true philosophy of a subject so intricate as this would be too subtle for the caricaturist, who simply tells us that Jack or Patrick committed murder or felony, and was sent to prison, and the treadmill, and Botany Bay. Cruikshank's argument is, that because Jack by crime exposed himself to punishment, and got punished, therefore Jack was a fool to risk consequences so unpleasant. But might not the same prudential argument be turned against innocence itself ? And if we were as clever caricaturists as Cruikshank, might we not compose a plate illustrative of the folly of virtue ? If dishonesty lands its more artless practitioners on dunghills, it also not unfrequently rewards its craftier votaries with considerable comfort, and even luxury ; and the readiness to lie when the world requires it has saved many a man from social degradation. Some things ought to be said and done which, if estimated in this prudential



way, are follies, and nothing is proved against a criminal by merely showing that his act may lead to unpleasant results. A taste for reading the Bible, which is not now considered blameable in this country, has brought hundreds within the terrible grip of the Inquisition. Bad deeds are not distinguishable from good deeds by the reward they bring to the agent; and if homicide leads one man to hard labour for life, so there have been instances where it has opened paths to the loftiest social ambition. It is probable that virtuous men enjoy a serene independence of outward circumstances to which the vicious never attain; failure does not fret them, nor hardship weary them so much; but this inward peace is rather beyond our Hogarths and Cruikshanks, and it is even beyond the sympathy of our common public, which, in its commendable love for good folks, is never quite content unless the novelist rewards them with a carriage and pair. And even this inward peace of the virtuous is not always to be counted upon, for virtuous people are not always altogether satisfied with themselves.

Without being one of the most remarkable instances of Cruikshank's unusual precision with the point, this etching is accomplished and even brilliant in execution. There are some admirable gradations on surfaces, as, for instance, that on the left leg of the large central figure, and there is a choice of means affording powerful contrasts of manipulation. Observe the vigorous touches on the detached stone, and the handling on the figure itself. The sea and sky in the little subject mentioned above as number 9, are very simple in method, but as good as the bits of distance in some of the most celebrated old masters.

*The Elves and the Shoemaker.*—There was a shoemaker who worked very hard and was very honest. He had nothing left but leather for one pair of shoes; he cut it out and laid it aside at night, and next morning found his shoes made. As the workmanship was very good, there was no difficulty



in finding a purchaser, so the poor shoemaker bought more leather and cut out several pairs of shoes, and laid the pieces in the same place at night, and the next day found the shoes finished with the same excellent workmanship. The process was repeated, till the shoemaker became rich ; then he and his wife determined to watch at night, to see how the shoes were made, and they discovered that two industrious little elves came and worked for them. Then the shoemaker and his wife resolved in their gratitude to make clothes for these elves, because they were naked, and they made little garments and laid them in the room and watched for the elves, who on their arrival, dressed themselves with great glee and ran away capering out of the door, never again to enter it. But the shoemaker and his wife remained rich ever after.

This pleasant tale, in a well-known book, Grimm's "German Stories," was so well adapted to the genius of Cruikshank, that it has suggested one of the very best of all his etchings. The two elves, especially the nearer one, who is putting on his breeches, are drawn with a point at once so precise and vivacious, so full of keen fun and inimitably happy invention, that I have not found their equals in comic etching anywhere, and they are as supreme in their own department of the art as Haden's "Shere Mill-pond," or Claude's "Bouvier" in theirs. It is said that these elves are regarded with peculiar affection by the great master who created them, which is only natural, for he has a right to be proud of them. The picturesque details of the room are etched with the same felicitous intelligence, but the marvel of the work is in the expression of the strange little faces, and the energy of the comical wee limbs.

*Return from a delightful Trip on the Continent.*—This is a fair specimen of Cruikshank's simple manner. It is a scene of sea-sickness ; a boatful of passengers, male and female, are landing from a continental steamer. The sea is very rough, and in the little transit the passengers suffer acutely.





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figure of the Colonel. The people behind him must be several miles away ; the floor of the room, if judged by aerial perspective only, is as broad as the lake of Lucerne.

*His Highness.*—Colonel Newcome is saluted by the Indian. Observe the entire absence of local colour. The Colonel's black hat and blue coat, and Barnes Newcome's black evening costume have exactly the same weight of colour as Colonel Newcome's white shirt-frill.

*A Meditation.*—Clive is meditating in his studio on the vanity of mediocre painting. The opportunity was a good one for clever sketching of still life, but it has not been seized upon or cared for, and Doyle has taken no interest in the things that surround the artist, which are sketched quite unobservantly.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### *SAMUEL PALMER.*

**T**HIS artist is one of the few really great English etchers, but as it results from the nature of his work that each plate of his is very costly in time, and as he happens to be a successful painter in water-colour, the consequence is that his production in etching has been extremely limited. For reasons which I have endeavoured to explain in the chapter on the Revival of Etching in England, a successful painter, however well he may be able to etch, can do so only at a sacrifice, and etching is too laborious, as well as too much like the ordinary work of a painter, to afford the refreshment of a recreation. So long as human nature remains what it is, people will not highly value a work of art which others can easily procure, so that the more public the benefit which an artist bestows upon his countrymen, the less will be his reward. If ever a true appreciation of art shall become general amongst our descendants, they will wonder how it was possible that Samuel Palmer, to whom was given genius and length of days, and who in his time, as they will see, was one of the most accomplished etchers who ever lived, should have left behind him just half-a-dozen plates. We can tell them how it happened, how one who had mastered the art and loved it, neglected it year after year, simply because his contemporaries did not value beauty when it could be multiplied.

The work of this master in etching has been more than once compared to mezzotint engraving. I said in the first edition of *The Etcher's Handbook* that "the delightfulness of



it might be preserved in mezzotint," and a critic in one of the leading reviews said "Samuel Palmer is in fact a mezzotinter." Such expressions as these are due to what is at first sight most obvious in this master's way of etching, the richness of its light and shade. Constable said that one reason why chiaroscuro was of such great importance was because it first struck the spectator. Now the light and shade of Palmer's etchings might, indeed, be copied very accurately in mezzotint, and a good mezzotint engraver would come nearer than any other engraver to the general aspect and quality of the plates, but a fuller study of the originals, and a sounder knowledge of the resources of different arts, will prove that Samuel Palmer is not simply a mezzotinter, not simply an imitator of mezzotint in etching. The principle of his work is much wider than that. It may be expressed in a single word—eclecticism. Etching is so versatile that you may imitate several different arts by means of it, and, therefore, an artist skilful to avail himself of this versatility may select the qualities which in other arts seem to him most desirable, and combine them harmoniously in one work. This is the true explanation of Palmer's method. He is an eclectic, an artist who, although using etching as his means of expression, remembers all along the powers and qualities of other graphic arts, and adopts them when he chooses, incorporating them into his own work, but so ably that its unity does not suffer. It is quite fair to say that he has adopted the qualities of mezzotint so far as they are to be got by work that is bitten and not raised in a bur, but it is not fair to imply that he limits himself to these qualities. In the very same plate, which strikes you by its resemblance to a mezzotint, you will find, if you look into it more closely, that there is an abundance of well selected line-work, not less masterly in choice, and right in expression than that of Turner and Haden, though quite original, and consequently different from theirs. And besides this line-work, if you look more closely still, you will discover passages which





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tenderness which is alive to all loveliness, even that which is most lowly and obscure, hardening itself against nothing that is beautiful. Rarely has an artist's maturity been so complete. The work of his old age is like a great fine fruit which has been in the sun for many days, until all its juices have had just the full time and heat needed for the most perfect mellowness, yet on which you shall not find the slightest sign that it has hung on the branch too long. No young man ever had the fulness of knowledge which is necessary for such work as that, and few old men have had the serenity of temper, or the powers of work, which are needed for such a complete expression of their knowledge.

"During twenty years," I wrote in 1872, "Samuel Palmer's work has become for me more and more beautiful, more and more abundantly satisfying. It is so tender as to remind us of all that is softest and sweetest in the heart of pastoral nature, and yet so learned that it seems as if some angel had met the artist in his studious solitude, and taught him. Imaginations graceful as a maiden's dream, but without her ignorance, teachings profounder than those of science, yet without her pedantry, a serene spirit inherited from the true and great poets of the times of old who are his fathers—all these he gives us with his art."

His aim as an executant is not consciously distinct from passing thought and feeling, it is not thought of by the artist as a purpose in itself. Here let me pause to consider one danger concerning execution in the fine arts which I have not hitherto dwelt upon, but which is serious enough to merit grave consideration. A practised executant acquires a fatal facility, so that at last he can execute without having either new thoughts or new emotions. He has certain forms in the memory like a printed schedule, and he fills them up mechanically, without waiting till he has ideas to put under the several headings. Nothing can be more convenient to the handicraftsman than this power of working without thinking, but



nothing is more dangerous to the artist. It hurries him along whether he is ready or not, till his soul becomes a mere victim tied to the tail of the executive habit which gallops away like a wild horse, the bit between its teeth. As one art illustrates another, and the fine arts are all subject to the same laws, I may take the case of an orator whose tongue goes as fast as it can whether the ideas are in time for it or not. The best public speaker I ever heard avoided this error completely. He spoke slowly when the thoughts followed slowly, and had the courage to remain quite silent from time to time when the thought was not ready for expression. It is far more trying for an orator to do this in the presence of a thousand hearers, than for an etcher in the solitude of his own room, and yet graphic artists have rarely authority enough over the hand to make it follow the mind instead of leading it. Samuel Palmer said of Claude, "his execution is of that highest kind which has no independent essence, but lingers and hesitates with the thought, and is lost and found in a bewilderment of intricate beauty." In this sentence we have the key to the writer's own ways of work as an etcher: he dislikes execution, however brilliant, which is not subordinate to the thought; or perhaps, to put it more accurately, the best execution, in his view, is tentative, and submissively waits whilst the mind seeks, always humbly following and endeavouring to obey, never hurrying the executive processes till they get ahead of the perceptive and inventive processes. And I venture to add that the beautiful sentence in which Samuel Palmer described the excellence of Claude is accurately descriptive of his own excellence, and I would have said of Samuel Palmer, if I had known how to write anything so good, just these words, "his execution is of that highest kind which has no independent essence, but lingers and hesitates with the thought, and is lost and found in a bewilderment of intricate beauty."

*The Early Ploughman.*—This etching was first published



in the first edition of the present work under the above title, but on more recent impressions I perceive that Mr. Palmer has added the inscription,

“The morning spread upon the mountains.”

I always greatly admired this plate, but the full beauty of it was unsuspected until Mr. Palmer set up a printing-press in his own house, and his son began to take proofs under the artist's direction. The earliest proof of this plate in my possession is of a state preceding the final one, and is touched upon by the etcher to mark intended alterations, especially in the poplars, the biting, however, is definitive everywhere,\* and yet the work looks comparatively grey and pale, owing to unscientific printing. The impressions in the first edition of *Etching and Etchers* are better, but are still far from doing full justice to the plate. In November and December 1873, Mr. Palmer having then established his private press, his son kindly took two proofs for me, which for the first time made me fully acquainted with the merits not only of this particular work, but of its author's method of etching. The use of vigorous line-work in the poplars and elder to the right may not be so obvious as it is in Turner's etchings, which were shaded in mezzotint, but the principle of it is the same, and the lines themselves are nearly as vigorous as those of Turner. The execution in this part of the work, indeed in most of the etching before us, is founded upon the strong etched line for organic markings, whilst a delicate close shading at a later stage of the process does for it what the mezzotint did for Turner's etchings, or in other words gives it shade and mass. The reader is requested to guard himself against the almost universal confusion between line and outline. He will find most vigorous line-work in Palmer's etchings, yet hardly such a thing as an outline any-

\* The reader acquainted with technical matters will learn with some surprise that Mr. Palmer has never once had recourse to rebiting. This only shows the remarkable skill with which he manages the acid—a skill the more remarkable that he has etched so few plates.





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hours, and has watched them all his life. No sudden delight in the unaccustomed spectacle of a sunrise ever yet gave the town-bred artist such knowledge of the dawn-mystery as this. Many a night has the etcher of this plate wandered in a land of beauty from sunset to sunrise, from twilight to twilight, from the splendour of the west to the splendour of the east, watching through the gradual changes of the hours, and gathering for us that rare learning of which his works are full.

*The Herdsman.*—This plate was published in the *Selection of Etchings by the Etching Club*, 1865. The subject is a moonrise in a hilly country. To the left is a magnificent tree (chestnut, I think) in full foliage, and under it the herdsman is driving his cattle towards the farm which lies in the dark hollow, and is made visible only by the moonlight which catches the edges of the roofs and gables, and the smoke from the chimneys. In the right foreground is the broken trunk of a tree, which also catches the moonlight, and there is a great sparkle and glitter of it upon the leaves in this part of the etching. The hill is extremely dark, and above it the sky is covered with a voluminous cloud.

The sky in this magnificent plate is etched upon the same principles as that in the *Early Ploughman*; the treatment, too, of the figure and animals is like that of the ploughman and his oxen, but the rest of the etching is done very much upon the principles of woodcut, I mean that the artist, although he has been working in black, thought rather of the white spaces or specks which he reserved in the midst of it than of the black itself. In the large chestnut the etched line is still visible as a means of defining foliage, but the leaves and trunk under the moon are all picked out of an intensely black ground in touches of white. It is wonderful how minute are many of the atoms of white which have a most important influence upon the effect. Those in the dark hill are most of them scarcely bigger than a pin's point, and yet they prevent the darkness from being *black*, whilst at the same time they



give obscure indications of form, which make the hill really a hill, and not a mere flat piece of black paper. The massive tree to the left is one of the finest studies of foliage ever etched. Every cluster of leaves has been carefully thought out for itself, whilst the grandeur of the masses has been preserved as completely as it could have been in the most energetic sketch. The little gleams of light along the edges of the roofs reveal the various curves caused by the yielding or irregularity of the timbers, and even in such a minor detail as the goad on the herdsman's shoulder the utmost care is taken to indicate its departure from mechanical straightness. I could not mention a better example of pervading artistic intelligence, which whilst never forgetting, even for an instant, the unity of the whole work, applies itself nevertheless with unfailing and unflagging attention to every detail, however apparently insignificant. It is scarcely too much to say that there is not in this etching an atom of white or black—I will not say the size of a pin's head, but rather of its point—which is not there in obedience to a distinct artistic decision.

*The Rising Moon.*—This plate was published in 1857 in a little set issued by the Art Union of London. The moon has nearly but not quite disengaged herself from behind the shoulder of a hill, and she lights a flock of sheep in the foreground. The scenery is of the same order as that of the preceding subject. It is amongst the low hills of the south of England, and we are looking down into a hollow, in which nestles a large gabled mansion. A church tower is dimly visible against a dark hill, a few poplars rise out of the hollow against the sky, and a tree in the foreground catches the moonlight in its leaves. To the right is a vast plain with a level horizon, responded to by level lines of white cloud in the elaborate sky.

This plate has the technical qualities of the "Herdsman," but not in so striking a degree. The subject is very beautiful,



with an aspect of more perfect repose and serenity than the other etching. Notwithstanding the rather coarse texture of the sky, it fulfils its purpose admirably, proving what a peculiar thing interpretation is in art, and how opposed to imitation. No natural sky ever showed texture of this kind, with its strong markings of black lines and dots, and yet this texture perfectly conveys to us the character of sky intended. The whole plate is interesting as a study of texture, observe especially the soft wool of the sheep with the moonlight on it and in it. The figure of the rustic in his smock is beautifully indicated by touches of white.

It seldom happens that Samuel Palmer does anything which can be found fault with from the artistic point of view, his arrangements of material being generally not only quite above censure, but marked by a happy originality of artistic thought and invention. In the present instance, however, he has fallen into the well-known error which is commonly called exaggerated perspective—commonly but not quite accurately, as the perspective itself may be free from exaggeration, scientifically true, and yet sure to give a false impression. It would be out of place to enter fully into this subject here, for the few who understand it need no explanation, and the many who do not would require a complete essay on the subject, illustrated, which they would never take the trouble to master, so I will say simply that the sheep here are not in false perspective, but in very injudicious perspective. They look monstrously big, and the rustic who is coming home does not look distant, he seems like a pigmy. The landscape is far too beautiful and too interesting to be a mere background to the sheep, and the sheep are too important to be nothing but adjuncts to the landscape. Besides this there is not drawing enough in the sheep for that scale. They ought to have been drawn as Rosa Bonheur draws, and not mere bales of flesh, wrapped up in wool, with a head at one end or the other.

*The Morning of Life.*—This plate has also been called





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about them deserves to be noticed. It is one of the few defects of etching that the needle cannot enlarge and diminish the line in the same stroke as the brush can, or even the pen ; but here this defect is apparently overcome, and there is an increase of thickness in the lines, which often begin with a fine hair-stroke and become broad in the middle, ending again almost imperceptibly.\* These organic lines, strongly bitten, are the skeleton of the subject, and over them is cast a veil of shade, not deeply bitten, and with very little texture in it, as soft in quality as the shade in a charcoal drawing.

So much for the means employed. The knowledge of effect is of course consummate ; it is proved more especially by the way in which the blaze of sunlight fuses and burns away, as it were, the branches and leaves which come between us and the orb, carrying away even the solid edge of a strong bough. Yet there is no exaggeration of light in the foreground, for there is really a screen of branches between it and the sun, admitting only a filtered light. As for the figures it is impossible to introduce figures more beautifully in landscape. They are drawn with the most exquisite taste, and with all the knowledge that is needed, whilst for combined energy and grace of attitude they remind us rather of Stothard or Flaxman than of any inferior men, though neither of these great artists could have set figures in landscape as these are set.

*The Full Moon.* (From Bampfylde's "Christmas.")—A rustic is bringing his sheep into the fold close to a thatched cottage. Children are coming to welcome him, and a little girl is petting the dog. The door of the cottage is open, and we see the plate-rack inside, and the housewife preparing the table for supper. High in the sky is the full moon, over the tops of the trees.

There is some particularly thorough branch-drawing here in the near tree to the left. The figures are very beautifully

\* This is probably managed by repeated touches with a fine point.



conceived, in movements at once most natural and most graceful. As for the tonality of the plate, it is so perfect as to produce, after looking at it for a little time, almost the effect of illusion. It is one of the most thorough pieces of etched chiaroscuro in existence, the notes of light and dark being all faultlessly in tune, like the notes of a well-played melody.

*Sunrise.* (Published in the *Portfolio* for November 1872.) —Another very perfect little plate, having on a much smaller scale many of the qualities which we have already noticed in "The Morning of Life." The sun is rising between the gable of a farm-house and the trunks of trees in a wood. A herdsman with his dog is driving two cows across the foreground. In the left-hand corner a tiny cascade of water is falling from the rock into a little pool. The trunks of the trees cast shadows, and the ground is brilliantly illuminated by the early light.

It is unnecessary to enter into any detailed description of this plate after the criticism of the larger one in which the same effect is rendered. In its own way it is like some pearl or diamond without a flaw, but pearls and diamonds are very common things upon the earth in comparison with etchings of this quality.

*Come, thou Monarch of the Vine!*—In the "Songs of Shakespeare," illustrated by the Etching Club, the most perfect work which the club ever produced, Samuel Palmer had two compositions, the larger one representing the arrival of Bacchus amongst his worshippers in a wood where the vine grows luxuriantly amongst the trees, and the other representing four plump, naked children gathering grapes from a vine which creeps round a massive bole, and hangs from mighty boughs. In these two subjects the figures are of much more apparent importance than in the others which we have been considering, in fact these are strictly figure-compositions. The larger one is full of power and vivacity. Bacchus comes



in a blaze of light, truly divine, and his worshippers receive him with *aves* of extravagant ecstasy. The figure-drawing is at once energetic and voluptuous, the action and composition artistic in the extreme, quite in the temper of the great masters. The whole scene is full of light, and life, and joy, enough to make would-be revelling pagans of us all, eager to be drunk with new wine in some warm southern bower, and there sing

Come, thou monarch of the vine !  
Plumpy Bacchus with pink eyne ;  
In thy vats our cares be drown'd,  
With thy grapes our hairs be crown'd,  
Cup us till the world go round ;  
~~Cup~~ us till the world go round !





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Millais has produced since he abandoned pre-Raphaelitism have been little else than etchings in spirit, though they are technically woodcuts because they have been engraved by the woodcutter.

There is, however, a very wide difference in delicacy between these woodcuts and the original etched work of Millais, a difference quite enough to make us deplore that condition of the public taste which renders it an imprudence for him to etch his own designs, when the finest line of the needle would be safe for ever, and yet not an imprudence, even for so successful a painter, to draw upon wood when every line is imperilled by the burin of the engraver afterwards. I have already gone into the commercial reasons which account for this. The picture is profitable because it is unique, the woodcut is profitable because it shares in the large sale commanded by a popular novelist; but the etching is neither unique on the one hand, nor popular on the other. Yet it is a great loss to the fine arts when such a draughtsman as Millais has to entrust his designs to the wood-engraver instead of etching them himself. He has all the gifts of the etcher, and if this earth were a world in which all good gifts were valued at their worth, Millais would by this time have entrusted many noble designs to the faithful keeping of steeled copper.

*The Young Mother.*—This is the twenty-ninth plate in the etchings published for the Art Union of London in 1857. It is the best etching by Millais that I have seen. The figure of the young woman is very beautifully sketched, as she bends over her infant and kisses the palm of its tiny hand. The lines which indicate the folds of her dress are, in the lights, very free and true; but in the shaded parts the cross hatching made use of is not quite so purely etcher's work. The Highland cottages and sketch of shore in the distance show most intimate knowledge of the true character of Highland scenery, and much affection for it.



## CHAPTER X.

### *COPE, HORSLEY, HOOK.*

UNTIL the plate of "The Life School, Royal Academy," was exhibited by Mr. Cope in 1867, the position he held as an etcher was on the usual level of our Etching Club, but the "Life School" revealed more power and originality. It was published in the first edition of this volume.

In Mr. Cope's earlier manner the cleverest thing I remember is the study of the old man in the illustrations to the "Songs of Shakespeare" ("Passionate Pilgrim"). That figure was remarkably observant and truthful, and drawn with unusual precision. There are several etchings by the same artist of much inferior merit.

Mr. Horsley has etched a few really good things amongst others not so good. His touch is often free and right, and his still-life is usually admirable. When he spoils a plate, which he has done occasionally, it is from over-work in hatching.

Mr. Hook has done one magnificent plate, "The Egg-gatherer," but his etching aims so decidedly at full tone that when the relations of light and dark come wrong in the biting the work is lost and spoiled. When tone-etchers succeed it is well, their work looks rich and full ; but when they fail, and they often do so from mere miscalculation about acid, not from ignorance, the failure seems complete. Mr. Hook relies much upon texture also, and little upon line, and the quality of his work is always painter-like. The smaller illustration of Shakespeare's song, "Who is Silvia?" is the nearest approach



to line-etching that I know of his. When an artist has reached such decided success as this we hardly like to discourage him by suggestions of alteration in manner; but if Hook could keep his full and rich tonality, whilst adding to it some liberty and emphasis of line, and some bolder use of open line in shading, he might become an etcher of a higher order.

COPE. *The Life School, Royal Academy*.—This is a true etching, and one of the manliest pieces of work ever executed in England. The subject is a remarkably good one, because it composes of itself so naturally, and because the effect of chiaroscuro is so powerful. Of all recent attempts to render the naked figure in pure etching, the model here is one of the most successful,—it is frank and genuine etcher's work; the reader is especially invited to notice the way in which the reflected lights are reserved on the muscles of the back, and the firm shading over them. The figures of the students are very true and various in attitude. Much of the power of this etching is due to the fearless use of the pure etched line, which is often left to itself, as for instance on the floor and screen, and when crossed by hatchings, as in the curtain, and dark shade above the reflectors, never interrupted uselessly, but for the simple purpose of obtaining necessary darks.

*Winter Song*.—This is a fair example of the better sort of English work. It is not yet strong etching, because there is little power of line, but the shading is in its way honest, though it would have gained by greater simplicity and openness. Mr. Cope has produced other etchings of this class which it is not necessary to criticise specially. He has carried the kind of execution which has been chiefly aimed at by the Etching Club as far as any of its members.

HORSLEY. *The Duenna's Return* (in Mr. Cundall's series).—A duenna is coming back from a walk, and finds her charge





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in the distant clouds, and in the foam that breaks amongst the rocks. Both cliff and sea are, I will not say etched, but *painted* with all the artist's habitual wealth of colour, and it needs but little imagination to supply the very hues themselves.

*The Fisherman's Good-night.*—A fisherman is parting from his wife and child, who are sitting on a high sea-wall to which a strong ladder is bound firmly. The man is just descending the ladder, and his right leg is straight whilst his left knee rests upon the wall. The conception of this etching is almost as painter-like as that of the one just criticised, but it is not so successful in execution because there are obvious failures in tonality. The two legs are one undistinguishable blot; and the side of the ladder, the man's waistcoat, and the cliff behind him, are all as nearly as possible of one tone. It is quite curious how certain modern English etchers dread the frankness of a clear line. If Rembrandt had had to etch that ladder and that pair of trousers, he would have shaded them with honest open strokes, presenting, it is true, no appearance of paint, but far more explanatory of the thing. And even when a great etcher is not very explanatory—as will sometimes happen when the nature of material is half lost in undistinguishable shade—he will throw his lines across it without trying to soften them into the semblance of water-colour washes. In this fisherman and ladder ten strokes are given where two were necessary, and after all the subject is so little explained that you cannot distinguish one leg from the other.



## CHAPTER XI.

### *CRESWICK, REDGRAVE, RIDLEY.*

**C**RESWICK etched very prettily, but his work was very distantly related to the greater art which has sometimes occupied our thoughts. Creswick's workmanship was delicate and refined in the extreme, and his oppositions of tone were usually just, but he had no independent and original interpretation. The craft that he had learned, and he *had* learned it, was taught him by the engravers, not perhaps in direct personal counsel, but by an influence fully received, whether consciously or unconsciously. If he had a bit of pasture-ground to etch, or a piece of foliage, you are sure to find the very touches with which professional engravers are accustomed to do these things. Some of Creswick's vignettes are good enough as engraver's work to be inserted in very carefully illustrated books; one or two of them might be published in Rogers without giving any unpleasant shock to eyes just fresh from the marvellous handicraft of Goodall. Considered in this independent way, without reference to the art of etching as it was understood by Rembrandt and the great etchers, the work of Creswick is of remarkable excellence; but here, as in so many other cases, we have to make the reservation, that, however pretty and delicate it may be, this is not the kind of work which an etcher ought to aim at or care for. It is so very pretty, that, if issued separately from the work of other men, it is probable that it would even be popular; but its popularity would do no good to the work of stronger etchers. The fact is, that etching of this kind is already quite



popular enough—there is much of it in modern landscape-engraving; and although the public rebels against powerful etching, it accepts this without any audible complaint; nay, it does not even know that such work is etching at all, so pleasant is it to look upon, but rather inclines to the belief that it is graven work, the doing of which is a mystery.

Mr. Redgrave, the now veteran painter and writer upon art, has also been a contributor to the publications of the Etching Club. The temper of his work is always studious and sincere, and, besides these qualities, it has a certain tenderness of sentiment, but, from the technical point of view, it has been injured by a striving after finish, which was due, in part, to the habit of working on a small scale. In 1867 Mr. Redgrave exhibited a plate at the Royal Academy which proved that his earlier habits of almost painfully minute execution were by no means inveterate. That plate was somewhat too violent in oppositions, but it had the true spirit of etching, and was not spoiled, as some of the earlier ones were, by too much labour and too little selection.

Mr. Ridley is a rising and well-educated painter, born in 1837, who has etched a few plates, chiefly of shipping on tidal rivers. He is a very genuine etcher, apparently of the school of Whistler, but in those plates of his which have been published up to the present time I do not see much evidence of very keen or subtle observation, whilst they certainly (being merely studies) exhibit no power of composition. His name is mentioned here not as that of an etcher who has already produced important works, but as an example of soundness in study. There can be little doubt that if the art were encouraged amongst us Mr. Ridley would soon become one of its leaders. So far as he has hitherto gone he is on the right track, but in his praiseworthy rebellion against the faults of the superfine school he is temporarily primitive in method, and seems at present to have little conception of the different





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clump of magnificent elms, and there is a church-tower in the remote distance. The sweetness and beauty of this little composition will be appreciated, I suppose, by every one. The workmanship is very perfect of its kind, and, after the reserves which have been made above, may be praised very heartily.

**REDGRAVE.** *Barbara.*—A vignette in the “Songs of Shakespeare,” which may be taken as representative of what were the tendencies prevailing in the English school at the time of its production. The plate is finished like a miniature, and quite in the spirit of miniature-painting. Barbara is sitting by the stream, according to the song, and her figure is surrounded by a sort of framework of trees and plants, every leaf of which is a separate and careful study, but there is less careful attention to masses. This etching required the most delicate printing, and could only be perfectly seen in the early impressions on India paper printed for the Etching Club.

*Corpse discovered in a Wood.*—The body, probably of a murdered man, is found lying on its back in a little hollow by a gentleman walking that way. This is one of the best of Redgrave’s very laborious plates. He would have painted the same subject still better.

*Silver Thames.*—Exhibited in the Academy, 1867. A view on the Thames, very expressive of the character of its scenery. Alternate gleams and cloud shadows give variety to the lighting. The oppositions between the shaded and the lighted trees, though by no means too strong for a statement of that isolated natural fact, are, nevertheless, too strong relatively to other things in the plate. For example, the shaded side of the punt, though quite black, is not and cannot be black enough relatively to the black distance, and the reflection of the trees in the water is even lighter than the trees reflected. The clouds are boldly put in, but are somewhat heavy and wanting in form. On the whole, however,



the plate is really an etching, though not yet of first-rate quality, and real etchings are rare.

RIDLEY. *North Dock*.—Artists are always teaching us to see something in what we believed to be without interest. Here is a chimney with a little building near it as ugly as any in Lancashire, and yet it must be good material, for it seems right in its place. The masts of the shipping, though rudely sketched, give the effect of intricacy. There is not much composition in the plate, but the manual work is simple and free.

*Draham Harbour*.\*—Rather better than the preceding. A true etching in a simple manner; the etched line is relied upon everywhere.

*Durham*.\*—The scenery of the river shore here is quite remarkable for its ugliness, but the etching is on the whole a good one, in spite of foul chimneys. Mr. Ridley's honest objection to anything but the plain line sometimes leads him to an unnecessary asceticism. The water and sky are here exactly of the same vacant white, whereas the water would have benefited greatly by a little delicate tinting in dry-point. A reflection is always darker than the thing reflected, except when there is a thin stratum of mist on the water-surface.

\* These two titles "*Draham Harbour*" and "*Durham*" are given because they are engraved under the etchings, but a correspondent in the north drew my attention to their evident geographical inaccuracy. "*Draham*" probably means *Seaham*; as for *Durham*, it is not yet a seaport, whatever future engineers may do for it. Let me remind my correspondent, however, that a critic can only call works of art by the names they bear, whether correctly or erroneously bestowed upon them.



## CHAPTER XII.

### *TAYLER, ANSDELL, KNIGHT.*

**F**REDERICK TAYLER carried the English manner as far as any of his contemporaries. There is especially one etching of his, in the "Songs of Shakespeare," which has not, in that kind of work, been surpassed. But Frederick Tayler had too distinct manners as an etcher: the highly finished modern way, depending greatly on crevés,\* of various depth, and on dry-point whose bur is removed; and a much simpler manner in which the qualities of highly-finished etching were not aimed at. An example of each is criticised below. I should say, judging from Mr. Tayler's skilful and rapid manner in water-colour sketching, and from the ability displayed in the few etchings of his which have been published, that he had all the natural gifts of a first-rate etcher, and nearly all the knowledge, nothing having been wanting to the full development of his powers in that direction but their culture on a larger scale in works issued independently.

AnsdeLL is a very accomplished artist, and when he does not think about etching at all, but simply sketches as he would with a finely-pointed pen, he does work of a certain value which value depends on his knowledge of animals, and not on his knowledge of etching, in which he does not appear to be especially interested. I should place a considerable

\* To save the reader the trouble of referring to the book on Processes, I may say here that the *crevé* (I know no English equivalent for the word) is a hatching, so close that the separations of the lines crèvent (give way, die, disappear) in the biting. Crevés are of various depth, according to the length of the biting.





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drawn such a stag better. In this kind of etching there is not much technical superiority, because the technical difficulties of the art are scarcely contended against; but if we consider the work simply as a drawing, we must admit that it is very highly accomplished. The vivacity and precision in the stag's eye and ears and nostril, and the true setting of the noble head, prove thorough knowledge of the animal. However this may fall short of great etching, there is no technical failure, and the plate shows none of those painful signs of mistaken and wasted labour so frequent in modern work.

*Fellow-commoners.*—Donkeys and sheep on a common. This is the eighteenth plate in those published for the Art Union of London. The drawing of the asses and sheep is not quite so brilliant as that of the stag just criticised, with the exception, perhaps, of the foal which is lying down. As in the previous subject, the artist has not attempted full tonality, and the landscape is exceedingly slight.

KNIGHT. *The Peasant and the Forest.*—One of the plates in a volume called *Etched Thoughts*, published in 1844. It may be noticed as a special variety of mistaken work. The touches are innumerable, but they explain nothing; the labour has been unsparing, but it has led to nothing. The man's gaiter, the bark of the tree and its section, are all executed in the same manner; there has been no selection, and the consequence is confusion.

*Drinking Song.*—This etching was published in the "Songs of Shakespeare." It is interesting to me as a sort of forerunner of Unger's work, which looks almost as if it were based upon it. See the study of Unger in the chapter on etching from pictures.

In this composition, which keeps well together, the artist commemorates the old convivial custom of clinking glasses, now fallen into disuse in England, though still kept up on the Continent.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### *CHATTOCK AND GEORGE.*

**M**R. CHATTOCK'S earlier studies in etching were very matter-of-fact and almost photographic transcripts of simple nature, but as he persevered his work gradually became less prosaic and more imbued with the sentiment of an artist. He is now one of the best etchers of landscape in England. A specimen of his earlier manner may be found in the *Portfolio* for May 1871, and if the reader will compare that plate ("Bridge on the River Blythe") with any recent etching by the same artist, he will at once perceive in what various gains of facility and force true progress in art consists. The plate just mentioned is very truthful and honest work, but the critical spectator perceives, at the first glance, that the etcher has not yet begun to feel the power of the etching-point, that he is trying timidly and carefully, and rather with the seeking of the student than the decided volition of the accomplished artist. A plate published in the *Portfolio* for September 1873, which is criticised below, showed a surprising increase of power both in the use of line and in light and shade, but the etcher was still evidently rather overwhelmed by his own hard sense of fact, so that there was a superfluity of literal truth. Since then Mr. Chattock has published a series of illustrations of Eton College and its neighbourhood, which retain all that is needed of the substantial qualities gained by his painstaking early literalism, but exhibit a much more comprehensive sense of natural beauty and a finer feeling for art. The ability displayed in this little series of etchings



led me to think that Mr. Chattock would succeed in etching from pictures, so he undertook for the *Portfolio* one of the noblest landscapes by Gainsborough in the National Gallery. The picture, in all its great qualities, was strongly opposed to Mr. Chattock's earliest manner, yet such had been his advance in art that he thoroughly shared its grand and solemn spirit, and rendered it with so much skill that it is difficult to imagine how it could have been rendered better.

Mr. George is an architect who having been accustomed to make sketches during tours undertaken for study, conceived the idea that he might make etchings from some of them and publish them together in a volume. He has published two such volumes up to the present date, the first entitled "Etchings on the Mosel," the second, "Etchings on the Loire." Each contains twenty plates, remarkably equal in quality, and preserving so much of the freshness of a first impression that if we did not know they had been done through the medium of studies we should at once infer that all of them had been etched from nature on the spot. On the whole, the second series is better and more interesting than the first, good and interesting as that was. Nothing can be more honest and genuine than the work in all these plates ; there is no attempt, in any of them, to pass off the result of accident as the result of art, everything clearly is what the artist intended it to be ; and this absence of affectation is carried so far that, although some little bits of drawing here and there may appear amateurish or even puerile, the artist has the courage to leave them and expose himself to some degree of misunderstanding rather than spoil the freshness of his plates by correction. The principle on which they are executed is simplicity itself. The serenity of the sky is always represented by white paper, the imagination of the spectator being left to supply whatever gradation may be necessary. Clouds are lightly indicated with a few lines, pale in tint and free in execution. Distances are lightly sketched, but more shaded than clouds, foregrounds





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preserved. The flat land on each side of the river is skilfully though slightly treated, and so is the distance, but nothing in this plate proves the artistic power of the etcher so much as the perfectly judicious management of the sky and the water. It is a bright but cloudy day, rather showery, with glimpses of blue sky, and the artist has conveyed the impression of all this as completely by free point-sketching, not very deeply bitten, as he could have done by the most patient engraving. The water is quite a model for the wise use of line for ripple, and of thin dry-point tinting between the bitten lines for reflections.

*Monkey Island.* ("Sketches of Eton.")—A particularly clever piece of lowland landscape with water and poplars. The reflections in the running water are simply and powerfully drawn. In this plate Mr. Chattock uses to great advantage a technical resource which is very familiar to him, that of employing thick lines and thin ones in the same place to get transparency, the thin ones acting very like a glaze in painting.

*The College from the River.* (Sketches of Eton.)—One of the richest and most brilliant etchings in the series. The college buildings look exceedingly grand, with all their turrets and battlements, and the manner in which the rippling river just recognises them all in broken reflection is quite a lesson for a student of landscape. The lighting is unusual, for the front of the building is all in shade, and the sunshine only catches the roof, and the low trees, and the grass between the college and the river, but the effect is excellent, and all the better in this instance that it enhances the impression (which is the true one) of a grey, old building, darkened with the gloom of centuries, situated in the midst of the ever-renewed freshness of nature.

ERNEST GEORGE *Trier, the Market Place, Fountain, and Rothes-Haus.*—I will leave Mr. George himself to describe



the subjects of his plates, and then add a few sentences of criticism. After speaking of the decline of Trier he continues—

“There is, however, life and activity in the large market-place, from which our sketch is taken. A handsome Renaissance fountain forms the foreground. As we saw it at harvest time the figure surmounting it had in its arms a sheaf of newly-reaped wheat which shone golden against a blue sky. Market women were busy around it with their large baskets of blooming fruit. Fantastic gables and high roofs enclose the lively scene. Foremost of these old buildings is the *Rothes Haus* in our picture with its steep slate roof and its carved gables down the street. It is built of the red iron-stone on which the city stands. It was once the *Ratshaus*, but is now the comfortable hotel at which we stayed.”

The two principal things in the etching are the house just mentioned, and the fountain. In the foreground are market-women with their baskets of produce. The fountain is skilfully drawn, but rather over-bitten in the blacks, the market-women, baskets, etc., are just of the quality we find in the old woodcuts of such subjects in the *Penny Magazine*—no better, no worse, but the drawing and shading of the old *Ratshaus* are to my taste very refined and delightful. The building is all veiled in a delicate semi-transparent half-tint, the light slanting down across it and catching the battlements beautifully.

*Schloss Elz. View of the Castle approached from Carden.*  
“Winding down a richly-wooded valley, we have all at once before us the marvellous group shown in our sketch. *Schloss Elz* is rising out of the lofty rock, round which the stream of the *Elz* makes almost a circuit. Here is the most delightful cluster of towers, turrets, and gables, dormer windows and bartizans, making a broken outline against the sky.”

*Schloss Elz* looks so much like the fancy of some artist-poet that one has a difficulty in believing it to be real. Mr.



George has drawn all the upper part of the castle admirably well, having evidently enjoyed the roofs and turrets as they deserved, but he has not fairly drawn the rock on which the castle stands, nor the bushes on the rock. Stronger\* work here would have benefited the plate considerably.

*Angers. Hôtel de Pincé.* "We show in our etching a white stone palace of the Renaissance period. This picturesque château has been miscalled the Hôtel des Ducs d'Anjou, but there is no evidence that those magnates ever crossed its threshold. It is a princely dwelling, and was erected by Pierre de Pincé, one of a family in high favour at the court of Francis I. The house is a characteristic example of the buildings of a time when a broken and Gothic outline was preserved after the introduction of pilasters, cornices, and classic mouldings. The circular projections corbelled out from the wall are favourite features in the work of this period, and turret-stairs, as well as oriel windows and balconies, were made to serve the architect in his scheme of light and shade."

This is a very beautiful example of the best qualities in Mr. George's system of etching. Instead of the black opaque blotches of printing-ink which do duty for shadows in vulgar work, the shadows here are pale and luminous with reflection, and rich in interesting detail, as they were probably in the palace itself. Another thing which pleases me very much in this kind of drawing is the reliance which the artist so wisely places on very slight markings and distinctions. The outlines of the palace against the sky are, on the lighted side, so faint and thin as to be barely visible, yet the slightest unnecessary heaviness in these lines would have gone far to destroy that aspect of aerial elegance which lifts the building so much above the level of prosaic architecture. Yet although there is much delicacy in this drawing there is no weakness. All construction is thoroughly understood and fully explained. Every important

\* I do not mean blacker work, but drawing with more meaning, drawing representing substance more decidedly.





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# ETCHING AND ETCHERS.

## BOOK V.

*THE INTERPRETERS OF PAINTING*

AND

*COPYING IN FACSIMILE.*









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in the interpretation of works by other men an interest and stimulus sufficient to sustain him through such labour for many years. When painters etched it was seldom from their own pictures, still less from pictures by other artists. If they thought it desirable to preserve some memorial of the works which left their easels, a slight sketch on paper, with a wash of shade, was enough to recall the picture to the memory, and ensure, as in Claude's *Liber Veritatis*, its identification by future purchasers. The time required to etch a picture satisfactorily would in itself have been a decisive objection, but besides this there was not until quite recently any great accumulation of general experience about the best methods of interpreting brush-work with the etching-needle, so that there was hardly anybody in Europe who quite knew how it ought to be done. If, then, it had occurred to a painter to keep a record in etching of the pictures which he produced, he would probably have confined himself to a simple memorandum in line, done on the principles of a pen-sketch, without any attempt to imitate handling and texture. Such a memorandum would have had its use, but could not, in the nature of things, have conveyed to others anything like a perfect conception of a picture which they had never seen.

The modern art of etching from pictures intends to go very much farther than this, and does indeed, in skilful hands, succeed to a degree which may well surprise a critic who is thoroughly acquainted with the difficulties of the process. The facility with which the etching-needle is handled in comparison with the difficulty of the burin, and the fact that it is held in the fingers exactly as a brush is held, instead of being pushed like the burin, are indeed greatly in the etcher's favour, but the difficulty of getting accurate light-and-shade by the use of acid is as much against him. In etching of a simpler kind, when the lines are very decided and well separated, partial failures in biting are not fatal to the quality of the work, for the quality in line-etching depends upon the



amount of knowledge and feeling which is put into the line, and even when the line is bitten too much or too little, the knowledge and feeling originally put into it are still quite clearly visible. But in shading, which is nothing but shading, the case is altogether different. Here, if the tone is wrong everything is wrong, and the tone depends almost entirely upon the biting.

The general result of modern etching from pictures has been this. Some wonderful things have been done, and much that has been done is very satisfactory to painters, who are unquestionably the best judges of a matter of this kind. On the other hand a great deal of really bad and vile work from pictures has been published, and is yet published in steadily increasing quantity, work for which no true critic either of etching or of painting would consent to be held responsible. Etching from pictures has in fact become a regular business, and many artists have taken to it as a resource when painting or engraving with the burin did not bring a sufficient income. It is almost impossible to earn an income by original work in etching, even for the most gifted geniuses, but there is always a demand for the reproduction of pictures in various forms, and it so happens that publishers and their customers have perceived that etching can do this with effect. The etcher has indeed many advantages on his side when he interprets certain kinds of pictures. His range of light and dark is as wide as it can be; he can follow the oil painter down into his lowest tones, even to the obscure depths of gloom in the darkest old masters, and he can at the same time fully suggest the brilliance of the fairest complexion or the lightest costume. Persons who have never studied the subject are very apt to imagine that the scale of the different kinds of graphic art is much the same in all cases, since they all have black for their lowest note, and white for their highest, but this conception is very imperfect and inaccurate. Compare etching, for example, with any one



of the numerous photographic facsimile processes which are made to print typographically along with printed text, the blackest black which can be got by this surface printing is grey in comparison with the depth of the etcher's blacks, and at the same time the thinnest line in the photographic facsimile is thick and heavy in comparison with the faint lines which an etcher can draw with the sharpened needle or diamond point, so that he has the advantage at both ends of the scale. Besides this, as we have already observed, a skilful etcher has a great range of different textures at command, so that he can follow the painter pretty closely in the suggestion of surface quality, much more closely than the burin could possibly follow him. The needle is not a brush, and yet the more visible the brush-work is the more easily the etcher can explain to us how the painter used his instrument, for he enjoys just as much liberty as the painter himself, and wherever a hog's bristle has left a marking he can imitate it. The same facility with the point, and the fineness with which it can be used in drawing, make it an excellent instrument for the rendering of expression. Its superiority in this respect is so marked, that some of the most eminent etchers from pictures, when left free to choose their subjects, have willingly interpreted painters who, like Franz Hals, made expression an especial study.

In estimating work done from pictures, the reader is requested to keep constantly present in his mind two principles which are independent of each other, or nearly so, and which when reduced to practice are found to be complementary of each other, the principle of imitation and the principle of interpretation. In working from nature the imitative principle is a very dangerous one to admit without the most jealous control, for when allowed to reign unopposed, it utterly paralyses all the higher artistic faculties, but in working from pictures the case is altered, and the etcher should imitate as much as he safely can, even to the very touches if possible.





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etchers hitherto considered in this volume. The reader will at once perceive the difficulty ; I for my part have felt it so much that I find it impossible to say much of these etchers personally without attributing to one of them, as a distinction, qualities which others have in an equal degree. For example, as an original etcher of still-life, Jules Jacquemart acquired a power so peculiar to himself that his plates were recognisable at the first glance, like some original and familiar signature, but since he has begun to work from pictures, many plates have appeared by him, which, if his name were not attached to them, might easily be attributed to another artist, even by an accomplished critic, well acquainted with Jacquemart's manner. There are plates by Flameng, Rajon, Waltner, and others, which it would be just as difficult to recognise as their handiwork. It is not easy, nor would it be right, for an etcher to supersede, by a mannerism of his own, the mannerisms of the different painters he interprets, but there is another reason which has of late years caused a very definite loss of personality in the etchers who copy pictures. A certain body of general executive experience has formed itself, and is now a common stock belonging equally to all who have thoroughly mastered the art. The younger men try to acquire this as quickly as they can, and the cleverest of them succeed in doing so very rapidly. They usually come to the art with the experience of a student who has gone through the regular continental education in painting, so that they know a good deal about the qualities of painting, and a moderate degree of application suffices to make them perceive the value of the common methods of interpretation or imitation with the etching-needle, which they at once adopt. A young man so prepared by previous general education in drawing and painting may soon become a clever etcher from pictures if he has good abilities, and if he has fine taste and sensitive feeling, with a naturally delicate hand, he may do really admirable work in a few years. But this rapidity of progress in our



younger contemporaries, is due especially to the fact that the way has been made plainer for them by the pioneers, especially by Flameng. What occurred in the earlier part of this century in landscape engraving has now occurred in etching, especially in figure-etching from Dutch pictures—a definitively best way of doing things has been discovered and is already traditional. We need not value the art less for this. An art may render useful service which is not the outcome of personal, individual genius. The engravers who interpreted Turner, and interpreted him on the whole so astonishingly well, were a school which had its methods in common. Take the volume of the “Rivers of France” and try to guess who engraved each plate, without looking at the engraver’s name in the corner. Those plates were done by twelve different engravers; can you recognise them by their work? No, you cannot; the book is so homogeneous that it looks as if the designs had been all engraved by one person. Exactly the same methods of interpretation are employed throughout. And yet what consummate skill!—what admirable precision in dealing with the most subtle distinctions of tone in those skies and water-surfaces of Turner! Here is a kind of engraving which, without being personal, since twelve men could do it, is still most useful and valuable, for it has rendered with exquisite delicacy the work of a great genius, and multiplied it by thousands. So it is already with this modern art of etching from pictures. It is not the new invention or discovery of every etcher who uses it, it is now very generally an acquired “business,” and yet its results may be well worth having.

Since, however, the etchers have so much in common, I shall not give them separate chapters as I did to the original men, but shall select for mention a few of their most important works.

**FLAMENG.** *The “Night Watch,”* after Rembrandt.—It is evident that in this ambitious and important plate M. Flameng



has determined to give to the world a striking example of his mastery as an etcher, and I was therefore the more surprised, when the work first appeared, by an obvious fault in tonality, the all but total loss of modelling in certain blacks where it ought to have been distinctly visible. The central figure is in full light; this is evident, for his extended hand casts a shadow on his companion, and his advanced leg casts another upon the ground; the face and collar, too, are strongly lighted, and yet the doublet and breeches are a black blot, in which nothing is distinguishable except a few little buttons. There is absolutely no form whatever in them. This solecism is so glaring that it strikes one at the first glance, and I expressed my surprise about it to the artist himself. He wrote, in answer, that the printer had overcharged the blacks in the printing, but also that the picture itself is so loaded with dirt that it cannot be properly seen, besides which it is hung in a little room badly lighted—so badly, that the etcher could never have made it out at all without the occasional assistance of a direct sunbeam. Flameng believes that Rembrandt's intention was not to paint a "Night Watch" but a daylight effect, and that this will become evident if ever the picture shall be cleaned and hung where it may be visible.

I have mentioned this in justice to the etcher. In every other respect the work is a marvel. If the reader has the opportunity of comparing it with any of the common engravings of the same picture (for example, the woodcut in Charles Blanc's *Histoire des Peintres*), he will soon perceive the value of Flameng's masterly drawing, especially in the expression of the faces, which in a work of this kind is the chief thing, the source of its human power. After that two other qualities are to be noticed—the brilliant use of line on a white ground, as in the shorter of the two central figures, the little girl, the collar of the tall man in black, and elsewhere; and in striking contrast with this the soft, rich shading, especially of the large clear obscure spaces in the background. If the student will





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produced. The qualities most valued in modern painting appear to be colour and texture (the most recent sales seem to prove it more and more), with *sparkle*. This plate is all full of texture and sparkle, with the suggestion of local colour which black-and-white art can give. It is quite a typical example of modern painting, with its little incident, its study of costume, its exhibition of technical dexterity. M. Flameng has thrown himself into the spirit of it as thoroughly as if he had been the author of the picture. It has never seemed to me that texture and sparkle were the highest qualities of art, but the modern public delights in them, and here they are, *tant qu'il en voudra !*

F. LAGUILLERMIE. *A Dwarf of Philip IV. of Spain*, after Velasquez. — This etcher has had the advantage of a more extended artistic education than is common in these times. He was taught engraving by Riffaut and Flameng ; he is also a *Grand Prix de Rome*, and a painter. He has gone through laborious studies in Paris, Rome, Athens, and Madrid. I mention this particular plate, which was published in the *Portfolio* for April 1873, as a fine example of a very free kind of interpretation. Any one who knows Velasquez will be very strongly reminded of him by this etching, and yet M. Laguillermie has worked quite in his own way, with strong sabre-strokes for shading, and not the slightest attempt to amuse us by pretty textures. The plate is one of my great favourites. The subject of the picture is deeply interesting, as the following paragraph, which I wrote in the *Portfolio*, will explain :—

“But there were differences amongst the dwarfs, which Velasquez perceived with his keen, artistic intelligence, and profound observation of mankind. One of them was merely silly, another scowled hatred and envy from under his beetling brows ; but this one, whose image is here before us, bears the pain of a nobler suffering. O sad and thoughtful face, look-



ing out upon us from the serious canvas of Velasquez, though the grave has closed upon thee for two hundred years, we know what were thy miseries ! To be the butt of idle princes and courtiers, and, worse than that, to be treated by the most beautiful women as a thing that could have no passion, to be admitted to an intimacy which was but the negation of thy manhood, to have ridicule for thy portion and buffoonery for thy vocation ; and yet to be at the same time fully conscious of an inward human dignity continually outraged, of a capacity for learning and for thought !—all this was enough indeed to drive thee to noble folios, that gave thee some sense of human equality, some intellectual fraternity and consolation !”

RAJON. *Portrait of John Stuart Mill*, after G. F. Watts, R.A.—M. Rajon is one of the most productive of the modern etchers from pictures, and at the same time one of the surest. He respects himself, and never issues slovenly or careless work, which cannot be said of all his brethren. It is not surprising that he should interpret the qualities of painting well, for he is a painter.

Mr. Watts has painted many portraits which have deservedly taken rank amongst the most important pictures of the age. It is almost a profanation to mention such art as his, so full of intellect and earnestness, so serenely serious, on the same page with the vulgar and brainless work which is the every-day product of the regular portrait-manufacturer. It is not necessary to define vulgarity in this place ; but I may observe that if any one cares to possess what is the exact opposite of vulgarity in portraiture, he may have it in this noble etching from a noble picture. There is no idle flattery here, no frivolous hiding of the signs of age, no lending of an inappropriate gaiety. The tailor and hairdresser did not determine the painter's work for him before he began it. One purpose only occupied him—to paint worthily a human head



that was worthy of being painted. Perhaps, indeed, and here is the only criticism I feel inclined to make, the costume and body have been *too* much sacrificed to the head; they are, in fact, seen under different degrees of illumination. You see as much of the body as you could distinguish in the gloom of the latest twilight, but the face is in the ordinary daylight of a room in "a good gallery light," and every detail is visible. Nor can it be fairly argued that the body is in shadow and the head in light, as it would have been a great *maladresse* to make the space of shade coincide so precisely with the black costume as to create confusion between shade and local colour. The flat equality of the dark background, in which, at least in the etching, no gradation of any kind is traceable, is also a mistake. It would be difficult to find, on the dullest day, in the plainest room, a space so absolutely without variety. The background and costume are both, however, very cleverly etched, and the effect they produce is like that of hearing two or three of the very lowest notes on the double-bass. The depth of etching, in the lowest notes, has seldom been more powerfully exhibited. The biting of the coat is almost as deep as the bitings in Turner's etchings.

The face is one of the very finest pieces of work ever executed. Some people say that etching cannot render modelling, and Mr. Ruskin says that it cannot represent hair; yet the modelling of this face is as thorough and elaborate as it could be in any kind of engraving, and the scanty locks of hair, and thin whiskers, are rendered with a perfection of texture not to be denied. The whole face is interpreted by the most judicious use of line, but always for the artistic purpose, never for mechanical display. All that is done has for its object either the plain rendering of physical structure, or the expression of character. Physically, you have a strikingly thorough study of bone, muscle, and skin, the last even to its wrinkles; intellectually, you have the





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and etching are full of subtlety and cleverness. The brilliantly etched jug to the woman's right was not set there without intention ; it corresponds to the head of the child, and so makes that of the housewife central. The lighting is full of knowledge. The absence of all bravura in the treatment is in harmony with the homeliness of the subject. The plate was published in the *ortfolio* for December 1874.

WALTNER. *L'Angélus*, after Millet.—I am sorry to have to preface my notice of this etcher with a word of blame, but he deserves it for being so unreliable. When he likes, he can etch as well as anybody, but he may at any time produce hurried and slovenly work incredibly inferior to his best. I must add that he is so very clever in the use of the dry point and the burin that he very often resorts to them, so that the most delicate parts of his work are engraved rather than etched ; this, however, is not an objection when the burin work is so ably done that it harmonises with what is bitten.

In this picture by Millet a man and woman are standing near to each other and almost face to face in a vast and perfectly flat potato-field with a level horizon high up in the picture. There is no other landscape than this, except that the spire of a village church and a few trees and buildings are visible on the horizon at a distance, but they are very small, like the minute distances of Paul Potter. The man and woman are French peasants who have been loading a wheelbarrow with potatoes ; both have left off working for an instant, and are praying, the man with bowed head, the woman with clasped hands, whilst they hear the village bell tolling the Angelus. It is impossible not to feel the deep sense of rustic devotion in this most impressive work. After the long day of dull labour in that monotonous field, flat and ugly as a desert, these poor people hear the sound of the evening bell from afar and forget their toil in prayer. The etcher has entered quite heartily into the sincere and earnest



spirit of the painter, and has etched the picture with so much good taste and feeling that the effect on the heart is quite that of the original painting itself, and yet the slightest mechanical ostentation would have at once destroyed it. People used to say that etching was hard and "scratchy"—this plate is as tender as a charcoal drawing, and as true in its light and shade.

WALTNER. *Dans la Rose*, after Carolus Duran.—A nude figure of a young girl which had a great success in the Salon of 1874. This plate appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* for June of that year. The nude, especially when of such a subject as this, which requires the most delicate treatment, is exceedingly difficult to deal with in any kind of engraving. Readers who are familiar with the sort of prints which were so much admired in the eighteenth century, when a profusion of naked limbs of gods and goddesses were represented as cushioned on rolling clouds, will remember how clouds and thighs were alike seized upon by the engravers of those days as pretexts for the exhibition of a certain skill in cutting clear curves with the burin. Such treatment could never give the natural texture, but was a negation and destruction of it. In the etching before us M. Waltner has treated the nude with the perception and sentiment of a painter. It is like fair living flesh, and not like the back of a silver watch ornamented with eccentric tooling. The outline is so soft that the eye, in trying to follow, is constantly losing and finding it. The modelling is wonderful, considering how limited is the scale of light and dark where shadow itself is fair like shaded snow. And yet the lights tell forcibly enough although there is so little shade to help them. All the rounding of the beautiful limbs and body is got by very simple and facile dry-point sketching, aided perhaps by the burin, but if so by the burin used quite freely and artistically as an etcher may fairly



employ it.\* The background of foliage and the foreground of plants are all bitten, and so is the abundant hair.

BRUNET-DEBAINES. *Intérieur de Cour en Italie*, after Decamps.—The original picture belonged to the Wilson collection, and the etching was published along with many other plates from that collection in 1873. The subject is simply a picturesque courtyard, with rough walls, archways, and galleries to pass from one house to another. There were great opportunities, in a subject of this kind, for Decamps to enjoy his singular powers of rendering rough textures, and also for his strength of light and shade. M. Brunet-Debaines has so completely reproduced the manner of Decamps in his etching, that any one who, without knowing the original picture, knows others of its class, by the master, will at once feel, after studying this etching, that he has seen the picture itself. Rarely has an engraver entered more completely into the tastes and qualities of the painter he had to interpret.

BRUNET-DEBAINES. *Ruined Castle on a Lake*, after Albert Cuyp.—It is by no means an easy thing for a good modern landscape draughtsman, such as the etcher of this picture, to go back to the landscape of the seventeenth century and throw himself into it quite heartily. The qualities of such a painter as Cuyp reside much more in pictorial harmonies than in any great knowledge of nature. There is so much in this picture which to an educated modern must seem poor—almost young-lady-like, if I may say so without offending both connoisseurs and young ladies at the same time—that one may very easily overlook its two great merits of repose and beautiful lighting. I was delighted, when the first proof was sent to me, with the etcher's absolute forgetfulness of

\* The burin has always been considered a permissible auxiliary tool for etchers. It is very useful in that way, but, unless in skilful hands, dangerous to the harmony of the work.





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slung behind him. Between these two, at a greater distance from the spectator, sits a younger officer in cavalry uniform, with his right arm resting on a table, the hand holding his pipe, which he forgets to smoke in his anxiety to guess from the expression of his superior's face the nature of the intelligence just received. The costumes are those of the eighteenth century, and so is the furniture of the room.

Every one knows with what thorough study and accuracy of finish Meissonier always presents the details of his figures and their surroundings, what a master he is of imitation, and how careful he has generally been to select subjects which permitted it. The present work is a striking example of the painter's qualities, and a still more striking example of the closeness with which a skilful etcher may echo the work of a painter, though the echo is but in black and white. Let us first do full justice to M. Mongin in the much higher study of expression, let us not forget that the faces are of chief importance here, and that they are rendered perfectly. We have the imperturbable look of the old general who reads the letter (you may guess about as much from his visage as from his pigtail), the rather wearied and anxious look of the younger officer, and the half-insensible but disciplined and military profile of the estafette himself, who keeps up his soldierly air though harassed by fatigue and want of sleep. This dramatic interest is, however, soon exhausted, for we are aware that we can never know the contents of the letter ; if we were in the theatre, the actor would read it aloud to us, but this painted actor is dumb and cannot even change his attitude, he must stand for ever, as he is standing now, with booted legs wide apart, in the attitude of the Colossus of Rhodes, and however weary the messenger may be he can never quit this presence. But such is the nature of pictorial art that when the interest of the subject is exhausted, that of the skill with which it has been represented remains. We follow, in imagination, the artist as he works, and are delighted by the triumphs of



his hand. There is plenty of such technical interest in the remarkable plate before us. The versatility with which the etching-needle is made to imitate the appearance of different substances—marble, glass, leather, wood, cloth, fur, etc.—and the accuracy of shading and biting which gives their *exact* relative values of light-and-dark, are in themselves interesting to a student of art. If the reader had the plate before him, he would perceive how many different kinds of treatment the etcher has adopted to get the different qualities of things—deep bitings and shallow, close lines and open, sharp accents and soft shades. I cannot see how Meissonier's picture could have been engraved more accurately with the burin even as to relative values of light-and-dark, but I know very positively that no burin-work could ever have got this variety and truth of texture, nor could it have followed so closely the minute points of drawing on which much of the fidelity of the translation into black and white depends.

WISE. *The Triumph of Scipio*, after Mantegna.—This plate was published in the *Portfolio* for January 1874, and was the first of the National Gallery series. The original work is a tempera design in chiaroscuro—a long frieze, of which only a portion is given in the etching. I mention it here as an instance of successful *interpretation*. It is not really an imitation of Mantegna's work, but a bold and powerful translation of it from the language of tempera into that of a simple sort of etching. You see at a glance what the work is, for no artifice conceals the strokes of the point, but you would have a difficulty in guessing the exact nature of Mantegna's painting, if you were not acquainted with it. In spite of what has been said in the last few pages about the imitation of texture in working from pictures, I do confess that a certain independence on the part of the etcher is by no means displeasing to me. This need not prevent him from expressing the clearest understanding of the picture before him.



LE RAT. *Portrait of Leonardo Loredano, Doge of Venice*, after Giovanni Bellini.—This is an uncommonly beautiful piece of *engraving*, but whether it is quite fair to speak of it in a book on etching may be doubtful. Let us take it as a text for a short sermon about the transition from etching to engraving. The etcher has generally a burin or two and a few dry points amongst his tools, the latter, perhaps, sharpened like burins with triangular sections and cutting edges. When the biting has not done all that was expected from it, the artist may feel indisposed to take the trouble of regrounding, so he works with the burin a little, or a sharp dry point of hard steel. After having done this often, he insensibly acquires considerable skill, and is more and more tempted to do it again. Finally this engraved work covers so much of his plates that, as in the present instance, it is equal in importance to the bitten work. Go a step farther still in this direction and you have the acid employed merely to fix a light design used for guidance, whilst the serious business of the performance is entrusted to the graver. Some etchers from pictures are now going so much in this direction that there is a chance of their becoming real burin-engravers ultimately. The plate before us was begun as an etching, and then engraved upon till it reached its present condition of high finish. Let me not be supposed to insinuate anything against it, for it is an exquisite piece of work, which ought to have satisfied both the Doge and grand old John Bellini if they could have seen it. (*Portfolio*, January 1875.)

JACQUEMART. *Repose*, after Berghem.—This and the following plates by Jules Jacquemart were published by Messrs. Colnaghi in a series from the Metropolitan Museum of New York. The artist prepared himself for this task and others of a similar character by the study of effect in etching, instead of pursuing his marvellously successful studies of form and texture in objects of still life. I well remember that





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tranquil spaces, the etching-needle can easily follow broken surfaces and ragged outlines. This we knew, but the novel element in this plate from Berghem is the successful imitation of luminous quality in the touches. In work of this kind the touches glisten like dewdrops; they are not paint, but an artful assemblage of jewels. I wonder what Jacquemart would make of the glitter in a dewy Constable; he would give it, I believe, with an unprecedented fidelity. Another reflection which occurs is, whether Berghem could have etched his own picture in this rich pictorial manner. We know what his manner was in his etchings—brilliant enough, but neither pictorial nor rich.

A close examination of the workmanship in this plate reveals so much of its secret as is dependent on method merely, and not on sensitive interpretation. The lines are never laid without great care for their tonic value; and so soon as any line, however short, however apparently necessary to the delineation of form, would interfere in the least with the tonic value of the painter's touch, it is suddenly abandoned, and an empty space left to tell the rest of its story. Treatment of this kind is as consummate, technically, as etching can be. The line is used quite frankly everywhere, and there is no attempt to hide it; but, on the other hand, the artist is never carried away by it, not even to the extent of the thousandth of an inch. The entire absence of that tightness of manner which very young artists often take for delicacy of drawing, may possibly incline some of them to pass by this work slightly, as a careless sketch of landscape. Any one of that opinion is invited, with due respect, just to copy the face of the woman on its own scale.

JACQUEMART. *The Moerdyck*, after Van Goyen.—The sort of subject which Zeeman would have etched in his quaint dry way, and it is highly interesting to observe the effects of Jacquemart's wider experience. Zeeman evidently enjoyed



light, and space, and movement ; but he had no richness, no *unction*, if I may use the word, nor did he understand fine arrangements of chiaroscuro. This etching from Van Goyen scarcely contains more lines, if they were counted, than one of Zeeman's plates, and yet the difference of arrangement and of manner makes this plate opulent and glowing. An ignorant etcher would have given a month of useless labour without getting either the light or the movement of these rolling clouds, or the smoothness of this calm water. There is nothing here but the bare etched line, as frank as possible everywhere, and yet the varied employment of it, to any cultivated spectator, suggests everything of the picture but its colour.

Though this is a merit of the painter's, let me add that the composition of this sea-piece is as subtle and cunning as the composition of a simple subject possibly can be. The concentration of light in the middle, by the golden cumulus and its reflection, the indication of perspective by the two lantern-poles on the sandbanks, brought purposely near in the picture, and contrasted in their leaning, the arrangement of the ships and boats, all in pairs (a common practice with Turner also, but not, as we see, invented by him) ; the smoke on the distant sandbank and its reflection marrying earth to heaven and water by a little central cloud—all these things, and more that I have not space to enumerate, prove the most thoughtful artistic intention. Even the cannon-smoke from the ships of war has its pictorial purpose ; it gives clouds close to the water, and these clouds help the light, for that against the focus of the picture is very much lighter than the other.

JACQUEMART. *Interior of a Dutch Cottage*, after Willem Kalf.—At the first glance, a critic half experienced in etching might fancy that this plate had been very imperfectly bitten, and that the etcher could not draw things clearly ; but he would be much mistaken, for it is one of the cleverest in the whole set. The subject is the obscure interior of a cottage,



with an effect of dull daylight through an unseen aperture of some kind. The play of imperfect light, the passage from light to obscurity, have been rendered by the painter with great care, and the one effort of the etcher has been to make things clear just to the degree which the painter intended, *and no farther*. On the part of Jules Jacquemart this must have needed especial self-denial, for it so happens that there are many things in this picture which, if left to himself, he would have drawn far more brilliantly than the painter. To publish an etching of this kind is certainly a very high compliment to the art-culture of this generation, as it is rather strong meat for babes; but we are bound to praise the forgetfulness of self and the simplicity of purpose in faithful interpretation of the picture, which are evident throughout this work. An uneducated public would see nothing in it—would not even be able to make out the objects which are indicated by chiaro-scuro simply without any explanatory design, a touch of light, a patch of shade, a half-light, and a reflection. What is the woman doing? I know, but leave the reader to amuse himself by guessing, with the observation that all northern readers will inevitably guess wrong.

JACQUEMART. *Portrait of a Young Woman*, after Lucas Cranach the Younger.—A very faithful and beautiful imitation of a quaint portrait in the costume of the sixteenth century, with a rich coif and necklace and a veil. There is an infinity of exquisite work in this etching, not only in the richly-patterned dress and background, but in the delicate pale shading of the flesh—a delicacy which adds much to the force of the fine dark eyes and eyebrows. The face has a serene, grave beauty of a very original type, and the expression conveys a mixture of tranquillity and firmness, implying eminent domestic qualities. Beautiful as it is, however, this plate may be taken rather as an example of the versatility of etching than of its especial liberty and power. It is im-





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taken separately, will bear comparison with the finest of those other distinguished interpreters of pictures whom we have already studied in this chapter. In one power he certainly surpasses every one of them, namely, in the critic's gift of sympathy with very different kinds of talent. It does not in the least signify what an original artist, who never translates the work of other men, and who never writes about it, may think of his rivals in this or any other age. The reader would be much astonished if he could learn how much ignorance and prejudice are perfectly compatible with a successful artistic career. But when an artist undertakes to interpret the work of many who differed in mental faculty and in technical training, both from himself and from each other, he must either enter heartily into their ways of thought or else grossly misrepresent them. He then requires that rare gift of a good critic which enables him to enjoy opposite kinds of work, and to admire them with such perfect sympathy that for the time being each may appear right and sufficing in its own order. Unger has this in perfection. I will answer for it that he must be a very delicate and discerning critic of painting, that his intelligence must be comprehensive and his appreciation just. The mass of his etchings, taken together, are, in fact, a commentary on many great painters, which, instead of being written out in words, is drawn on copper with the point. Throughout it Unger speaks to us as clearly about the pictures as Vosmaer, the distinguished critic, when he writes Dutch or French. To possess these etchings is much less, no doubt, in a general sense, than to possess the original pictures, but there is a certain special, yet very intelligible, sense in which it is somewhat more. We have here much of the painter, but not all; we have also something in addition, and that is the intelligent explanation and commentary of an observer who well knows what is admirable, and what is personal and peculiar, in the executive expression of the great painters whom he interprets



The picture before us, one of the most charming and interesting representations of domestic life in the seventeenth century which have been handed down to us, represents a young gentleman and his wife in their small but tastefully arranged drawing-room. The walls are covered with tapestry to the height of the door, and above the tapestry are hung Dutch landscapes, rather too high to be studied, but good as panels for the decoration of the room. The lady is standing at her open clavichord, the lid of which shows on the inside a sylvan landscape with musicians. The gentleman is gravely seated by the table turning the leaves of a book. On the table are a globe, a statuette, and an hour-glass. There is an indescribably charming air of learning, discretion, and artistic taste in the whole scene. It seems to us that life must have had true dignity, peace, and sweetness under these conditions. And now please observe how absolutely Unger throws himself into this grave and quiet temper, and with what unhurried sobriety every touch is laid! We shall see him in other tempers before we leave him.\*

UNGER. *Paysage Montagneux*, after Rembrandt.—This is one of the most complete of Rembrandt's landscapes, and a very fine and majestic composition it is. There is a river in the foreground with a windmill to the right, a bridge of one arch crosses the river, and a horseman is riding towards the bridge. In the distance is a hilly country with trees and some ruins.

\* So far as we may judge by the etcher's portrait of himself on the title-page, which by the way is one of the most consummate bits of free etching produced in modern times, it appears as if his own personal feeling were not only very different from that of the etching described in the text, but even strongly opposed to it. Unger's *own* manner would be light, facile, and intelligent almost to excess, but by no means distinguished for gravity or sobriety. That portrait of himself is done in an excellent spirit for an etcher. The drawing is sound and strong, without the least trace of any sort of pedantry, and the ease of it, which is the result of real power and knowledge, is truly marvellous.



The study of minute detail which prevailed in the English school some years ago is likely to make us undervalue the qualities of such landscape-design as this, which relies entirely upon mass ; but if the reader takes delight in the fine artistic arrangement of masses he will enjoy this landscape much, and be very thankful to Unger for the quiet truth of tone with which he has rendered it. The picture would not be difficult to copy in charcoal or sepia, but it must have been extremely difficult to etch, for it all depends upon tonic relations, and if they had gone wrong in the biting the plate would have been without meaning, for it has no strong expressive lines to help it. Unger has rendered it in the most unobtrusive way, and all has come just quietly right, even to the palest tints of the distance and the sky. How grandly Rembrandt has placed his ruin and supported it !

UNGER. *Buste de Femme*, after Rembrandt.—The lady shows one hand, her left, which is gloved and holds a flower. She wears a necklace of large pearls.

This is not one of the most striking plates in the series, but it is assuredly one of the most perfect. The face is treated with the greatest delicacy, and yet with consummate ease. Observe the thoroughness of the skill and knowledge with which the reflections are reserved. The texture has the softness of flesh, and that of the costume and background is vigorously opposed to it. Unger has entered so well into Rembrandt's spirit that we recognise the great master at a glance.

The eyes of this portrait are charming in their softness. I think Unger has made the hair a little too wiry and coarse, but the coarseness of texture in the dress is very valuable. The glove is inevitably ugly, for in those days nobody thought of such a thing as a glove that would fit the hand.

UNGER. *Le Dormeur*, after A. Van Ostade.—A cobbler is sitting asleep in a little corner close to a wooden partition.





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UNGER. *Portrait d'Homme*, after Tintoret.—This is the portrait of a young Venetian nobleman, perhaps twenty-seven years old, or so, but nothing seems to be known about the original except what may be gathered from the picture itself.

It is one of the grandest and most impressive portraits in existence. The dark face—of the deepest Italian complexion already, and looking like bronze when set upon that large white frill—is high up in the corner of the canvas to your right. The left hand of the portrait is hanging by his side, gauntletted in a great leather glove; the other, also gloved, is placed upon a table. The costume is that of the sixteenth century, but dark, grave, and without an ornament. The attitude is erect and soldierly, but the main power of the work lies in the expression of the face. The eyes are like coals of fire. It may be doubted whether such another pair of eyes exists in all the world of painting. When once they have looked at you, no farther explanation of the man's character is necessary. There are portraits of the thoughtful and melancholy kind, which have awakened an unceasing curiosity, but this would excite fear in a timid person, and resistance in a bold one. What a haughty scrutiny there is in that glance, and in those lips what iron resolution! This young lord of Venice, whoever he may have been, was one whose passion a woman might dread, and whose enmity a brave man might think twice before incurring. Laws and civilisation have in our days so quelled the fire of individual natures that we can hardly realise the time when passionate men were as dangerous as volcanoes; but there are a hundred such in Italian history, who were not better neighbours than Vesuvius.

Meanwhile we have forgotten Herr Unger, simply because he has done his work so well. Only one thing needs to be said specially about the etching, and it is this.—Some plates can produce their effect on the mind with little tone, but this one positively needed the darkness of the costume, and the



darkness of the face ; the impression on the mind is partly due to it.

UNGER. *Portrait d'un Chanoine*, after Antonis Mor Van Dashorst.—This is one of the finest of the serious portraits in Unger's portfolios. It is almost entirely in dark tones, and the etcher has not succumbed to the temptation of enlivening them by sparkle here and there, as a common engraver would certainly have done with such a piece of work before him. The dignity and sobriety both of the original painting and the reproduction are, in their way, beyond praise. There are no touches of light even on the eyes, and the small frills about the neck and wrists are so much shaded that they do scarcely anything to relieve the general gravity of tone. The canon's countenance has the same gravity and seriousness, but without any hard severity. He looks charitable, but not inclined to familiarity. *Charitas habenda est ad omnes, sed familiaritas non expedit.*

UNGER. *Hail, Fidelity !* also designated *Sir Ramp and his Mistress*, after Franz Hals.—A more striking contrast in both temper and execution than that between the picture just criticised and this one could not be imagined. From dignity and sobriety to their exact opposites seems a distance not easily to be traversed ; yet as Unger could be grave with the learned canon of Antonis Mor, so he can be jolly with this merry gentleman of Franz Hals. It is not simply that the faces here are gay, whereas the other was serious, but the very touch of the point is changed. Hals had great dash and decision in his handling, and a peculiar sort of flickering brilliancy, which was due to his way of rendering surfaces whenever he could by facets, and to his excessive taste for strong accents. It was essentially a vulgar conception of form and surface, but it had much—too much—vivacity. In this vivacity the technical manner of Hals corresponded



admirably with the sort of subject which he generally preferred; so that he had one of the greatest merits an artist can have, namely, a perfect harmony between mind-work and hand-work. The painting here is full of dash and *go*. The subject of the picture is a roystering blade in the height of a merry hour, his glass raised high, his face beaming with laughter and the spirit of loud jollity, whilst nestling under the huge plume of his prodigious hat is the merry visage of a woman, not pretty certainly, but able, as it seems, to enter into the gentleman's frame of mind. The most respectable personage here is the dog whose head appears in the corner.

This is the sort of life which Franz Hals lived, and this is how he painted it. Anything more spirited than Unger's translation of the picture it is impossible to imagine. All the life and vigour of Hals are reproduced in it.

UNGER. *Franz Hals and Lysbeth Reyniers, his second wife*, after Franz Hals.—This is quite mild and respectable in comparison with the other, but there is merriment here too. The painter is seated under a tree in a garden with his wife. Both are laughing heartily, and she has her hand affectionately on his shoulder. The absence of a wine-glass seems an unaccountable omission. Let us hope that the artist has inward satisfactions arising from recent and sufficient potations. He looks as if he had.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hals are most respectably dressed in black cloth and black silk, and their linen is elaborately got up—not a little matter in those days of huge frills, and cuffs, and collars. I mention the etching chiefly for the ease and simplicity of its execution.

UNGER. *The Governors of the Asylum for Old Men in 1664*, by Franz Hals.—In this picture the artist does all he can to be serious, yet nevertheless puts a twinkle of merriment into the face of an old man in the background, as if he were irreverentially laughing at the worthy Governors.





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interpreting rather than imitating a picture ; and I suspect that Unger himself must have been fully aware of its merits, for I see that he has (very allowably) put his signature conspicuously in the upper corner to correspond with that of "Paulus Potter" in the lower. Potter was a mere boy (only nineteen) when he painted the picture, and there is really not very much refinement of drawing about it ; but it is easier in manner than the work of young men usually is, for there is not the least strain or tightness. This facility has been rendered very happily by a corresponding facility in the etcher ; indeed it is a better etching than Potter would himself have made of the same subject, for he was always rather hard in manner as an etcher, though he drew well and distinctly. If the reader has access to the plate, let him observe the admirably slight treatment of the sky, on which no vain effort has been wasted, and the open work of the foreground.

There is a great deal of artist-craft both in Potter's management of this very simple material and Unger's interpretation of it. Four cows, a little old tree, a bit of fence, a little common rough pasture ground, and in the distance a tree or two, such as you may find anywhere—this is all ; and yet out of these materials the young Dutch genius constructed a picture which *is* a picture, and not a mere study as so many are. He knew how to make the most of his material. Such a work as this ought to be a consolation to artists who live in unpicturesque localities. The materials of art are everywhere, the makers of art are not so common.\*

\* A few words of praise are due to the spirited publisher, Mr. Sijthoff of Leyden, for the manner in which these etchings of Unger have been published. They are printed on fine Dutch paper, and mounted (pasted by the upper edge only) on sufficiently good boards, in such a manner as to enter into the most carefully arranged collections without farther change. They are accompanied by a text printed with the greatest taste on very fine Dutch paper. The only objection I have to make to the publishing of the set from old masters is that there is a difficulty of reference. The plates are numbered, it is true, in the corner of the boards, but there is no corresponding number in the printed text, so that the title



of the plate is not readily found. In the other publication from Franz Hals, this is managed better. The title is well printed in red ink on a fly-sheet which accompanies each etching. I observe that Mr. Sijthoff has three classes of impressions of the Hals series—artist's proofs on old Dutch or India, selected proofs on India paper, and prints, which put the price of each etching at 7s., 4s. 6d., and 2s. 6d., respectively. On the other hand, the series after various old masters is printed in one class of proofs only, and issued at a price which puts them at rather less than 2s. 9d. each. Considering the expense of text, covers, and portfolios, and the cost of printing, mounting, and advertising, with the deductions of agencies abroad, this is most reasonable; and Mr. Sijthoff deserves our thanks for placing works of real art, thoroughly well got up, within the reach of cultivated people who have moderate incomes. I see that M. Vibert is having his pictures etched by different etchers under his own superintendence, and that the series is to be published in parts of ten plates each, at £20 the part, or £2 each plate. Of course every one has a right to charge what he likes for his own merchandise, but I have already expressed regret that the circulation of works of art should be artificially limited by excessively and unnecessarily high prices, intended to give them a fictitious value as rarities. In the case of large plates which cost great labour, such as a few of the most important by Flameng, a high price is an inevitable necessity if the artist is to live by his work, but it is a necessity to be regretted both in the interest of the public and for the artist's fame. One great difficulty is the enormous trade percentages. I have known more than one instance in which publishers charged fifty per cent merely as agents, and left the etcher to pay all expenses of printing and advertising. M. Flameng is trying to avoid this by taking subscriptions at his own house (25 Boulevard Mont Parnasse, Paris) for two new plates of his, after Rembrandt—*La Leçon d'Anatomie*, and *Les Syndics*. He prints three classes of proofs at £8, £6, and £4 each. Rajon published his portrait of Stuart Mill at five guineas for artist's proofs, and two guineas for proofs after letters, but this was issued through the usual channels. There appears to be a demand for early impressions; but if the reader cares for artistic quality, and is a judge of it, he will value impressions simply for their merits, whether early or late. Unless in the case of drypoints, or etchings much retouched with drypoint (the bur being left) the five-hundredth proof may be just as good as the fifth, and will be better if the printer has been more lucky with it. A sufficient price ought always to be charged to allow the printer to give plenty of time and care to his work, and to destroy every defective impression. This is really important. The utmost care should be taken about paper, too, but this need not make etchings costly, for a sheet of the finest paper costs very little.

I much regret that Mr. Seymour Haden's very important plate after Turner's *Calais Pier*, a plate measuring a yard square, is not yet published (June 1875), so that I cannot speak of it in this edition of my book. It will, however, in all probability, need no help from criticism. A great press has been built on purpose to print it, paper has been manufactured specially, and costly real sepia has been procured from the Adriatic for the printing-ink.



## CHAPTER II.

### *ON COPYING ETCHINGS IN FACSIMILE.*

**I**T is an excellent but at the same time a most severe and irksome discipline, to copy etchings by great masters in facsimile. This may be done either by a student of the art for his own instruction or by an accomplished master in order to popularise noble works which in their perfect states are so rare as to be inaccessible to all but a few of the most wealthy collectors. The technical peculiarities of the old masters can never be quite thoroughly understood by us until we copy them, and the act of copying is a continual revelation, but the patience that it requires is unimaginable so long as we have not tried it. Young engravers with the burin are trained in the use of their supremely difficult instrument by a discipline of this kind, and although the etcher aspires to more freedom and originality of manner, he may do wisely, at a certain period of his career, to imitate their teachableness and forgetfulness of self, in order to study, line by line, the means of expression by which the immortal masters have given their genius to the world. Such work whilst it lasts is slavery, and to some utterly unendurable, but whoever can compel himself to undergo it will come out of it with tripled strength.

Line by line, I have just said, for in this close application of the copyist every line becomes a separate study needing a distinct effort of observation and another distinct effort of manual imitation.

There is not space in this volume to say much about the copyists, though some of them have done marvellous feats.





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will seize upon every etcher when he examines it. In a certain sense, and for some peculiar reasons which will be given in support of the assertion, it may be boldly affirmed that, as a technical performance merely, such a copy as this is even more wonderful than the original plate itself. There is a freedom from restraint in all original artistic labour which is not compatible with the duties of the copyist, and yet at the same time the copyist has to play his part so perfectly as to seem not less free in thought and hand than the original artist whom he is imitating. Rembrandt may get a shade, in the biting, paler or darker than he intended it, but who can point out where his idea was imperfectly realised?—or even in the drawing of a form a line may fail to correspond quite accurately to his thought, and yet no critic who ever lived discovered the secret of that failure. The freedom of original art is due to the impossibility of comparing the work of the artist with that which it professes to represent; but the copyist knows that the very first thing any one will do when he has the opportunity, will be to put his copy side by side with the original and test it by two comparisons—one for the general effect and the other for every detail. Hence, in selecting a work to be copied, we must remember that the more ease and freedom there is in the original performance the greater will be the difficulty of imitating it, and so true is this that painters cannot copy their own sketches. It is easier to write a thing for the first time freely in our own handwriting than to copy our handwriting in facsimile. A child could make a labyrinth of scrawls in a quarter of an hour which the most skilful draughtsman could not reproduce without great care and labour, and a considerable expenditure of time.

Now it so happens that this Hundred-Guilder Print offers every conceivable difficulty to the copyist. It is a piece of work in which great freedom of manner is united to an extraordinary delicacy both of line and tone, and no copy can be successful which does not render all those delicate lines and tones with



complete fidelity, whilst preserving to the full at least the appearance of that freedom which Rembrandt really enjoyed, but which in the copyist is nothing but the most consummate acting. It is in a certain sense more difficult to copy an etching in etching than to engrave a picture which the engraver may interpret as he chooses. Here there is no choice; whatever the master did the copyist must do after him.

The process, too, offers the peculiar difficulty that the artist does not see his work during its progress, except at occasional intervals, when the etching-ground is removed from the plate, and a proof taken between one state and another. Then he has to draw every line in reverse; and though he is aided by tracing-paper and the mirror, this is still a very serious inconvenience. And for the intensity of his shades he is dependent upon an auxiliary, which is proverbially difficult to manage, and capable of unexpected treacheries—the acid.

There are passages in a work like this which put to the severest test the capabilities of the executant, because if you cannot conquer them at the first stroke you cannot conquer them at all. There are faces which do not contain more than a dozen lines, and upon the exactness with which these are placed depends the whole expression of the countenance. Let the hand tremble never so little, and its uncertainty will be at once transferred to the copper in the weakness of a false and ill-regulated line. Although Rembrandt was prodigal of lines in transparent shades and half tones, he was most economical of them when he pleased him to *dessiner au trait*, and the copyist has no choice but to use a like economy. Now when the expression of a face, perhaps the face of the most important personage in the composition, is entirely dependent upon the correct and skilful drawing of one stroke, which in many such cases *cannot* be done slowly, and cannot be done twice without effacing it entirely from the copper, the reader will at once perceive the degree of sureness of hand and eye.



which is necessary for a feat of this kind, and he will, appreciate the difficulty of a performance in which such feats must be attempted over and over again.

M. Flameng was prepared for his task by a training much more complete than that which etchers have usually received. Men who loved and practised the genuine art of etching have hitherto generally been painters who could not give time enough to the copper to vanquish all its difficulties, and were therefore obliged to content themselves with work which, although it may have been roughly expressive of their ideas, was often, from the technical point of view, rude and imperfect in execution. Many amateurs have also attempted etching, and one or two of them have succeeded in producing the kind of work which a painter is most likely to achieve ; but neither painter nor amateur can attain the technical power necessary to cope with Rembrandt, unless he gives the time which Rembrandt gave. M. Flameng has had a thorough engraver's education, and is indeed at this moment one of the best burin-engravers in Europe ; and, besides this, he has from childhood been a passionate admirer of the great artist-etchers, whose spirit is his own spirit, whose antipathies and preferences are his own preferences and antipathies. Having studied Rembrandt all his life, and copied him not a little, he came to this plate prepared for his great task by the thoughts and labours of many previous years, and sustained and encouraged, more than would have been possible to any one a little time since, by that extension of a serious interest in etching which is one of the most striking evidences of the increase of artistic culture in Europe. It is something for a great engraver to feel and know, when he engages in such an enterprise as this, that in every capital in the civilised world there are at least a few intelligent and cultivated persons by whom he will be gratefully and immediately appreciated. This is not the sort of work which the vulgar have ever cared for, and they may be left to their showy prints ; but it fortunately happens that the cultivated





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indeed from "niggling"—is as remarkable on the one hand as are the sureness and selection of line on the other. The chiaroscuro is arbitrary, of course ; Rembrandt's chiaroscuro usually *was* arbitrary, and it would be easy to point out impossible lights and shadows. But, whatever Rembrandt had a mind to do, that he did in the most efficient and masterly manner. If he wanted a shade to be liquid and transparent, it became merely so much partial darkness, and you see through it just what you ought to see and no more. If he intended a form to be well defined, it will be clearly visible at the right distance, though the means used be of the slightest. If he wanted a light to sparkle, it became luminous like a jewel. But enough of these technical considerations. The technical craft is useful—it is even indispensable ; but its best employment is to lead us beyond itself to some thought that may lift up our hearts. There is one pale, plain grave face in the centre of the composition, surrounded by a nimbus of dim glory, which is more affecting in this earnest northern art than in the stately design of Raphael.



# ETCHING AND ETCHERS.

## APPENDIX.

### *PRACTICAL NOTES.*









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mechanical part of the work has been undeniably much improved during the last few years, as the reader will soon gather from the following pages.

If you get your plates from any good English makers you will seldom have any trouble on account of their quality. I have been well supplied by Mr. Wilson (Harp Alley, Shoe Lane, E.C.), and also by Messrs. Hughes and Kimber (West Harding Street, Fetter Lane, E.C.).

The chief defects to be guarded against are excess, deficiency, and inequalities of density. A plate good for engraving is homogeneous and sound in substance ; a bad plate is often either too hard or too porous, or both. After some practice the etcher may learn to test a plate in two ways, either by engraving a few lines upon it with a burin, or by leaving a few drops of diluted acid on its surface, and, after having washed them away, examining the roughened surface they have left with the help of a microscope. If the burin is used, the noise it makes will tell the ear, and the degree of opposition will tell the hand, when a plate is too dense to be of use, or when there are inequalities of density. The test by acid informs the eye when the grain of the copper is irregular ; this cannot be detected on the polished surface, but is seen easily when the acid has removed the polish and shows the real grain of the metal.

Hammer-beaten coppers are preferred to rolled coppers, and an experienced artist wrote to me, "When you order your plates, always order them to be extra-hammered."

It is well to order special attention to be given to the bevelling of the edges. If the plates are printed upon certain kinds of paper they will break the paper if they are not properly bevelled, and when the printer sees this result he reduces the pressure on his roller to avoid it, the consequence being weakness in the proofs. See that your bevelled edges are well polished, so that they may print clean.

Copper is the only unobjectionable metal for etchers. Brass is unequal, and is never used for anything artistic. Zinc is a very porous metal, but for rather coarse and picturesque sketches it may sometimes be preferred. I believe Jeanron used it for his rough sketches. Formerly the great objection to zinc was the small number of proofs which it yielded, but this is now overcome by electro-metallurgy. A zinc plate cannot be steeled, but it can be coppered, and with this protection will yield an edition. Zinc may sometimes be useful to amateurs who desire a small number of proofs to give to their friends, even without the coat of copper, and then it is a very cheap metal to use. Sketches done in a simple way, without much delicate shading, as, for instance, caricatures, may be just as good on zinc as on any other metal, but it is not suitable for finished work.

Steel was more valued for etching formerly than it is now. It was valued because it yielded large editions. A copper plate can now be covered with a very thin coat of steel by the electro-type process without injuring the artistic quality of the design, and the protected copper will also yield large editions. The copper plate can also be *de*-steeled and



re-steeled several times, so that there is really no longer any reason for etching on steel, and there is one most serious objection to it. One can never trust a steel plate out of sight without anxiety. People are so careless, even about the most valuable property, that they can seldom be trusted to take care of things that rust easily corrupts. A very valuable steel plate, by an eminent engraver whom I knew, was so entirely destroyed by rust that the idea of publishing it had to be abandoned. When copper plates are steeled we are still exposed to the rusting of the steel coat through the carelessness of printers, but this is nothing in comparison with the other danger, for though the rust may eat through the steel coat it will not attack the copper, and the only inconvenience is the slight expense of having the plate steeled over again. A short bath in weak nitric acid and water will entirely remove the injured steel coat without hurting the plate.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE NEEDLE.

ANYTHING in the shape of a pencil with a hard point will do for an etching-needle. Steel is the material usually employed for etching-points. They are very commonly set in wooden holders. The whole instrument may be made of a single piece of steel. In that case it should be kept thin from the point to the place held by the fingers, or else the eye would be inconvenienced by it, for in doing fine work a thick instrument troubles the draughtsman by always hiding some portion of the work that he desires to see. It is a convenience to have the instrument in a single piece, because when set in wood in the ordinary manner it becomes shaky in time, if much pressure is used. Weight is not an objection, but the contrary, for although an etcher's work must *look* as if his hand were light, he must never draw very lightly in reality—if he did, the point would not entirely remove the etching-ground. It might be sufficiently cleared away to show the copper, yet not entirely cleared away, so that the acid could not attack the copper equally. This is especially likely to happen to inexperienced etchers, because they retain from the practice of some other art, such as pencil-drawing, the habit of varying their pressure, and when they want to etch some delicate passage they instinctively, and without reflection, press too lightly.

When the etching-needle is sharpened to a fine point, it may easily be made so heavy that if loosely held between the fingers the mere weight of it will remove the ground sufficiently, but with blunt points which are used for thicker lines an instrument weighing 50 grammes is not heavy enough to remove the ground without being aided by pressure. We have therefore to keep up the habit of applying pressure in all cases.

A heavy needle may be sharpened at the two ends to different degrees



of sharpness. In this case it may be made thicker in the middle to gain weight.

For work of great delicacy sewing-needles may be used, set in a metal holder and held firmly in it by a little screw. They ought not to be thin, nor long enough to be very flexible, as when too weak they are difficult to draw with accurately.

It is these common sewing-needles, set in a holder, which are used when working in the acid, as the reader will see in the account of my positive process.

The needle ought always to be strong enough for the etcher to scratch well into the copper itself without stopping merely at the surface, for if he stops at the surface he may not be sure of removing the whole of the etching-ground, even though it seems as if he did.

There has always been some difference of practice amongst etchers about the sharpening of the needle. Some like it to come to a point (or to a flat blunt end for the thick lines), others like it to have a cutting edge like the end of a small chisel. There is a process called typographic etching, in which a brass plate is covered with a thick coat of a white composition like wax, and a very peculiar kind of needle is used to remove this, which is too thick to be dealt with by the ordinary needle. Having a set of these tools it occurred to me to try them in genuine etching, and after a little difficulty at first, I found them singularly valuable. The instrument is, to begin with, nothing but a little round bar of steel, a sixteenth of an inch thick. Two flat sides are made on the grindstone, which meet at an angle like a capital V in the *section* of the little bar. The top or round part is ground down in the form of a snout, like the snout of a field mouse, and there is a peculiar little edge at the very end like the muzzle of the little animal. The needle is set in a piece of beech, five inches long and a quarter of an inch in diameter. I believe these tools were invented by a son of Mr. Dawson, the eminent landscape-painter, so for convenience let us call them the Dawson needles. I discovered after some practice that one such instrument might be made to give lines of three very different thicknesses, by simply turning it a little in the fingers. One that I now use habitually gives me—

1. A very fine line in the direction of the cutting edge.
2. A broader line with the top of the snout when used upside down.
3. A very broad line indeed when used side-ways.

This, of course, depends upon the way of sharpening the tool. The practical reader will see at a glance the enormous advantage of holding three instruments in one. It is an embarrassment just at first, but after practice the hand becomes used to the capabilities of the tool, and by turning it, quite unconsciously, between the finger and thumb, converts it from one use to another.





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either in chloroform or ether ; it may also be dissolved in oil of lavender. If you make the ether solution let it stand for three weeks, and then decant the clear portion into another phial for use. Some years ago I used these solutions, and valued especially that in ether, but now that I employ the roller, which will be explained shortly, I have almost abandoned this manner of applying the etching-ground, except for the positive process. When solutions are used the etcher should take care to distinguish between *apparent* drying, which takes place very soon, and *real* drying, which may require many hours.

It is not easy to ascertain, without minute chemical analysis, what is the composition of different etching-grounds sold ready-made. M. Flameng tells me that those sold in London are too adhesive for his taste, but that they resist uncommonly well. The consequence of a too great degree of adhesiveness in the ground is, that when the etcher does not actually cut into the copper, he may not *entirely* remove the ground, though he thinks that he removes it, and as an extremely thin film is enough to protect the copper, the acid will not attack his lines. I have often been tormented by this inconvenience when using English ground, and a very great inconvenience it is, for if some lines are attacked, whilst others are not bitten at all, the result cannot fail to be a disappointment. M. Flameng says that a disappointment of this kind occurred to him when he used an English ground, but that he has never experienced it with the French one he commonly uses. I made his ground the subject of some experiments, and found it satisfactory, but for use with the roller I prefer that of Abraham Bosse.

Each of the three elements in Bosse's ground is there for some special reason, and has its own work to do. The mastic gives hardness, the wax softness, the asphaltum adhesiveness. The mixture of the three in the proportions given above secures that very peculiar balance of qualities which is required in an etching-ground. Pitch is used in some grounds to get still greater adhesiveness. Mastic and pitch would be brittle without wax, but they would perfectly protect copper against acid. Wax protects copper, but it is too delicate by itself, except for the positive process.

*A White Ground.*—White wax, 50 grammes ; gum mastic, 30 grammes. Melt the wax first as before in a pot surrounded with hot water, and then add the gum mastic very gradually in powder.

This is the same as Bosse's ground without the asphaltum. It is very transparent, but rather weak comparatively. Bosse's ground itself, when applied very thinly with the roller, will serve as a transparent ground if not smoked.

*Etching-Pastes.* The two grounds already described may be converted into pastes for application with the roller, by simply melting them and adding oil of lavender in greater or less quantity as the paste is required to be more fluid or more stiff. Mix the oil thoroughly with the ground by stirring with a glass rod. As for the quantity of oil required you can judge of that easily by letting a drop of the fluid paste fall on a



cold slab, when it soon solidifies as much as it can. If you find it too hard, add more oil. The most convenient kind of paste for use with the roller is just like the pomatum, sold by hairdressers, in consistence. It is better that it should be rather too thin than too stiff, but it ought to be stiff enough to stand and not flow. Whilst still hot and fluid pour it into wide-necked glass-stoppered bottles, and after it sets pour a little oil of lavender on the top of it to keep it from drying. With this precaution you may keep your paste indefinitely.

*Etching grounds for use with the brush.*—Take some of the paste just described with a palette-knife and add to it enough oil of lavender to make it sufficiently fluid for use with the brush. If you want a transparent ground nothing more is to be added, but if you want your ground to be black and opaque add lamp-black to it in impalpable powder with the palette-knife, and rub the lamp-black and the etching ground thoroughly well together till you have a sort of oil-paint. This black paint is a very good ground to be laid with a brush, and it is very convenient for use in certain circumstances. For example, a part of your etching is defective and you would like to draw it over again without destroying the rest of your drawing. Clean the ground off the defective place with a rag dipped in oil of lavender, and when the copper is bare paint upon it with the black paint, neatly joining up to the edges of what is to remain. Leave it to dry for twenty-four hours, and then you can etch the passage over again. I must warn the reader, however, that if the black paint is allowed to remain too long (some weeks or months), it is apt to become brittle and shell off if there is any excess of lamp-black in it. If properly mixed, and used within a fortnight, it is perfectly safe, and a very great convenience to an etcher.

*Stopping out Varnish.*—In the first edition of this work I gave three old receipts for varnishes of this kind, and the reader will find others in other books, but they are all defective. Either they are not fluid enough for stopping out very minute portions of work quite conveniently, or else they do not dry fast enough, or else you cannot work in them with the needle if you want to lay fresh lines across the portions of the plate which are protected by them. After many experiments, I hit upon a stopping-out varnish which has the following qualities :—1. It is as fluid as possible. 2. It dries at once. 3. It may be worked in afterwards with the needle.

To prepare it, make a saturated solution of white wax in ether.\* When this is left to settle there will be a part above, as clear as water, and a part below, just like milk. The *clear* portion is what you want. Decant this into another phial, and if you have any milky sediment, decant again, till all is clear. Add to this about one-sixth of its volume of Japan varnish, and mix well. You have now the best stopping-out varnish which has yet been discovered, but as it dries very rapidly it requires a little precaution in using. To use it pour a few drops of it into the tiniest bottle you can get, with a very narrow neck, and then dip a small brush into

\* Only a little wax is required, as ether will not really dissolve much. If, on settling, there is more than a third of milky fluid, you can add more ether, shake the phial, and let it settle again. The clear portion is a *quite pure* saturated solution of wax.



this, adding a drop now and then when wanted. Wash the little brush frequently in oil of lavender and wipe it well. If the varnish gets too thick you may thin it once or twice with a drop of ether, but when the sitting is over throw away what remains in the tiny bottle, clean it well, and take fresh varnish next time from your phial. There is no need to *make* the varnish afresh each time, it will keep for years.

In this mixture the ether is used for greater fluidity and more rapid drying than could be got by the use of turpentine; the Japan varnish is employed for its dark colour, its hardness, and its resistance to acid, the wax is used to correct the hardness of the Japan varnish, so far as to permit the etcher to work in it with the needle.

This varnish remains in perfect condition on the plate for some days or even weeks, but in course of time the hardening power of the Japan varnish so far overcomes the resistance of the wax as to make the varnish brittle and therefore unfit to work in with the point. I have always found that all ground in which Japan varnish is an ingredient became brittle in a few months, but when we know this it is not an objection, as there is plenty of time to etch the most elaborate plate before the brittleness comes on.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE ACID BATH.*

ONE of the very greatest of recent improvements in the scientific part of etching has been the discovery of the Dutch mordant. It is very slow in operation, but at the same time very sure. With Bosse's ground it enlarges the line but little, much less than nitric acid does. I cannot conceive how any etcher, who has used it, can employ nitric acid again except as an auxiliary, for a special purpose.

*The Dutch Mordant.*—This invaluable mordant is composed as follows:—

Chlorate of potash, 20 grammes; hydrochloric acid 100 grammes; water 880 grammes. Total, 1000 grammes, = 1 litre.

The way to make it is as follows. First heat the water by putting the bottle containing it into a pan also containing water, and keep it on the fire till that in the pan boils. Now add the chlorate of potash and see that every crystal of it is dissolved. Shake the bottle to help the solution. When no more crystals are to be seen you may add the hydrochloric acid.

Make a good quantity of this mordant at once, so as always to have a plentiful supply by you.

*The Nitric Bath.*—The acids commonly used for biting plates before the introduction of the Dutch mordant were nitric and nitrous acids diluted with water, usually with an equal quantity of water.

It is still necessary to keep nitric acid in the laboratory as an auxiliary,





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trive a convenient reduction of the ordinary printer's press, which, without occupying much space, would still be a substantial piece of furniture. If the reader can give a room specially to etching as a laboratory he will do well to get one of M. Cadart's presses ; if not, he will find those sold by Mr. Roberson more convenient, as they can be put out of the way in a minute. More ambitious etchers may set up regular presses like those used by printers. Mr. Haden's great press for printing the "Calais Pier" after Turner is a magnificent and costly machine, perhaps the finest in all London, Mr. Samuel Palmer, too, has a good press. If the reader chooses to launch out a little in this direction he may spend from £25 to £150 on his press without being cheated of a penny.

A press of some kind is not only desirable for an etcher, it is a positive necessity. The habit of frequently taking proofs advances him in his art, and in this sense it is not too much to say that the press is a silent but severe master, always ready to point out the defects of our work, or to encourage us when we deserve it. For etchers who live in the country a press is especially necessary, the delays caused by sending the plates to town every time that a proof is wanted are so annoying as to become in time almost insupportable, and lead to a despairing abandonment of correction.

The qualities of a good press are to have true motion, strong pressure which he might turn the cylinder. Some amateur fancied that the ring was inconvenient, and persuaded the maker to substitute a small wheel, to be turned with the hands. Now the consequence of this "improvement" is, that the proofs are necessarily weak, for if you put pressure enough on the roller by means of the screws to give you a fine proof, you will not be able to turn it with so small a leverage as the little wheel affords you. I therefore quite decline to be responsible for the success of any of these little presses, which do not afford some means of getting the necessary leverage. The original one in my laboratory has a ring, and to move it I insert a strong lever more than a yard long, which is equivalent to a wheel six feet in diameter, the spokes of which are merely levers of the same kind, fixed. When full pressure is on, I could not stir the roller without such a lever. Another press in my laboratory has a wheel of eight spokes, each of them more than a yard long. These are rather more convenient than the loose lever for a fixed machine, but the loose lever is more convenient for one that is not always in the same place.

A correspondent in America who has got one of the little presses from England says, that he fears the little roller, from its small diameter, will not mount the bevel of the plate, when there is pressure enough to give a good proof. Certainly it will not, unless there are slips of metal at the two edges of the travelling board, to keep the roller at a certain height above the board, so that it may not have to *rise* much upon the bevel. Suppose, for instance, that you are going to take a proof with one of these little presses which has a plain travelling board and a small roller. You put on a good pressure with the screws, the roller turns well, and the board travels until the plate is brought to the roller, which then turns round and round on the flannel, without rising upon the plate. You then reduce the screw pressure, but the consequence is that you get a feeble proof. I explained long since to the maker how this inconvenience was to be obviated, and here I will



and the least possible friction. The roller must of course be accurately turned, for if it is not, the pressure will be unequal on different parts of the plate. The travelling-board must also be well-planed, so as to be perfectly flat and of exactly the same thickness throughout. Perfectly good proofs may be taken by means of wooden presses (Rembrandt and his contemporaries used them), but it is necessary to send the rollers to the turner from time to time. In applying pressure by means of the screws the etcher should take the greatest care to observe that the pressure is equal at the two extremities of the roller; for if it is not, one side of his proofs will come feebler in the printing than the other side.

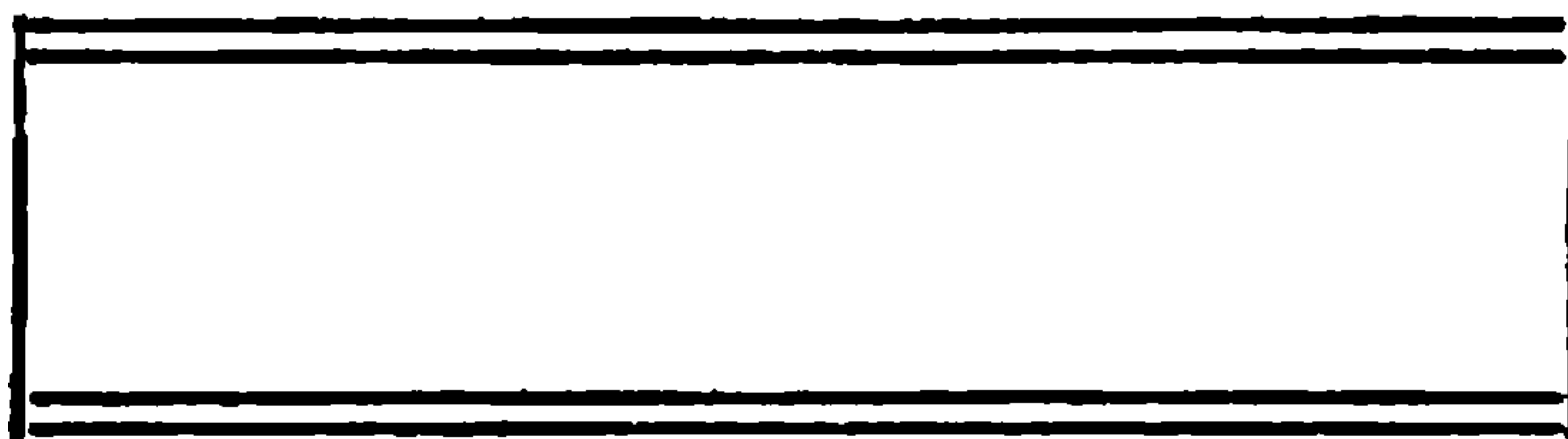
I will now give an inventory of things required in the laboratory and printing-room.

§ 1. A printing-press.

§ 2. A simple kind of screw-press to flatten proofs. For small plates a common copying-press will answer perfectly.

§ 3. Copperplates. Keep your spoiled coppers (you will have a good many such at first) and have them replaned. If strong at first they may be replaned two or three times. The etching by Lalanne in this volume is on a very thin copper, which has probably been several times replaned. A correspondent thought this objectionable, because thin coppers curved

explain it again. Screw two narrow plates or bands of metal along the sides of the travelling board thus, so that the roller may run on them as if on rails. They



should be a *little* thinner than the plate, and as long as the travelling board. The plate to be printed is now to be laid between them. By this contrivance, which I have tested in practice, the roller encounters no insurmountable difficulty, and the pressure may be put on by the screws to any amount required, for the production of a good proof. I can take proofs with the smallest of the miniature presses, as clear and powerful as with a large one, and the reader ought to be able to do the same.

I may add that Japanese paper is much easier to print upon than any other.

I have improved my own large press lately by the addition of guiding rails. These rails are of iron, with a square section of half-an-inch. One of them is screwed upon the board on which the small rollers run. The other is screwed *under* the travelling board, and both are placed exactly in the middle, so that the latter is just over the former. In my press there are four running rollers, three inches in diameter. These are of wood, so the turner made a groove in each of them for the guiding rails to fit into, and, therefore, when in action, each roller has the lower guiding rail in it below, and the upper one in it above. The consequence of this is, that the travelling board can never deviate in the least, for the rail on the fixed plank makes the rollers go straight, and the rail under the travelling board enables the rollers in their turn to compel the travelling board to go straight. The same improvement might be applied to smaller presses.



under the press, but M. Liénard, my printer, says that thin ones are as easy to print from as others.

§ 4. A roller for rebiting—the French *rouleau à revernir*. I shall write a little chapter specially on the various uses of this invaluable instrument.

§ 5. Three pieces of plate glass, twelve inches by ten, and three-tenths of an inch thick, like those used in photographic printing-presses. The use of these will be explained in the chapter on the roller.

§ 6. Dabbers. The best way to make a dabber is as follows:—Have some horse-hair, some cotton-wool, and a piece of black taffetas silk, of good quality. Lay the cotton-wool on the silk, first, in a circular shape, about four inches in diameter, then lay a good heap of well-separated horse-hair upon this. Draw the silk up all round and force the materials inside into rather a flat shape. Tie the silk together, binding it with a waxed thread, and cut off the superfluous silk. A dabber of this kind may be cleaned with turpentine, or you may put a new cover on it and renew the cover as often as you please, without making a new dabber. The readiest way to clean a dabber is to heat it over a spirit lamp, and then briskly wipe it on clean stiff canvas of the sort used in printing. Always keep dabbers scrupulously clean, and in a box of their own.

§ 7. Smoking tapers. What are called “cellar-rats” in France are the best for this purpose. To make them, twist eight cotton threads rather loosely together and dip them two or three times in molten bees-wax. Twist a dozen of these dips together, warming them in warm water to enable you to do it without breaking them.

§ 8. A holder for smoking. A common little tin cup with a flat bottom. You stick the smoking taper in this with wax, and it prevents the molten wax from running on your fingers. An extinguisher.

§ 9. A set of etching needles. See Chapter II.

§ 10. A burnisher. This is a smooth steel instrument for polishing copper by friction and pressure. It must be kept entirely free from scratches or rust-pits.

§ 11. A piece of deal with two grooves in it the size of your burnisher. In one of these keep a little emery powder, in the other some tripoli and oil. By rubbing your burnisher backwards and forwards in these grooves, you will keep it bright.

§ 12. A scraper. This is a three-edged tool, and its edges have to be kept very sharp or they will scratch the copper.

§ 13. A flat scraper shaped like a leaf, to be kept very sharp. When properly held in the hand this tool will take *shavings* off the copper half an inch or three quarters of an inch long. It is the most powerful reducer of surface.

§ 14. A good oil-stone to sharpen your tools.

§ 15. An engraver's magnifying glass, to be held in the eye.

§ 16. A larger magnifying glass, to be held in the hand.

§ 17. Several photographer's trays for acid baths, etc. They are best in glass, next best in white porcelain, after that come the gutta percha





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bound round with waxed thread. The edges of the cloth take the ink, and the dabber is held as you hold a tumbler-glass. This dabber may be about the size of a pint bottle, and not unlike it in shape. When new, the end should be neatly cut flat with a sharp knife, and singed.

§ 29. A plentiful supply of printer's canvas for wiping the superfluous ink from the plate.

§ 30. A small supply of *old* fine muslin, well washed till it is quite soft. This is used for what is called *retroussage*, which will be explained shortly.

§ 31. The plate-heater (for heating plates for printing), which is a box of sheet iron. It may be two feet long by twenty inches wide, and nine inches deep, unless you intend to etch *very* large plates, when of course you must have a heater big enough to warm the whole of your plate conveniently at the same time.

The inside of this box is to be kept full of hot air, which may be easily managed by having a hole in the bottom of it big enough to admit the chimney of an ordinary oil or petroleum lamp. If you have access to gas you can use it. French printers, from tradition, use charcoal cinders in a flat tray inside the box, with ashes over them to keep the heat regular for a long time. For occasional use a spirit-lamp does perfectly, but it would be expensive to use it long.

§ 32. A supply of paper for printing. If possible you should get a supply of Japanese paper, another of Dutch, and one or two varieties of French and English papers. Paper-making for etchers is now very well understood. If by chance you should run short of paper at any time, and want to take a proof, remember that a good proof may always be taken on any paper which is good for drawing upon in water-colour.

§ 33. A marble slab and muller for printer's ink. A knife for the same purpose, like a large palette-knife.

§ 34. The very finest whitening.

§ 35. A sponge to damp paper.

§ 36. A flat brush, like a clothes-brush, to brush paper.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE ROLLER AND ITS USES.*

THE roller is one of the great modern improvements in the technical apparatus of etching. It is a cylinder of wood  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, by 4 inches, with two projecting handles in its axis, each of them about an inch thick, and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches long. The roller is covered with thick smooth leather, but between the leather and the wood there is a covering of thick flannel to give elasticity. The leather is joined so neatly that the place where it is cemented is hardly perceptible. It is drawn over the edges of the cylinder, and tightened with strings like purse-strings, so that the edges



are rounded and covered. The reader will perceive that although the roller is a very simple machine, only a highly-skilled workman can make it perfectly well. The best are made by G. Schmautz of Paris, and they may be got from Cadart of Paris, or from Mr. Roberson in London. The price of one in Paris is twenty francs.

The roller is delivered in a box, which is so constructed that no part of the leather ever touches anything. The box is very important to protect the instrument from dust, and the roller is never taken out of its box for longer than just the time necessary for its use.

It was invented at first for one purpose only, namely, to cover the plate for rebiting, which I shall explain shortly, but etchers soon discovered that it was also an excellent instrument for laying the first ground. Before its introduction the dabber had been used for both purposes, a very clumsy thing in comparison.

*Laying the first ground with the roller.*—In the list of things useful in the laboratory and printing-room, given in the preceding chapter, I mentioned three pieces of plate-glass (see § 5). They are extremely useful when you employ the roller, though not absolutely indispensable. Copper-plates, such as you etch upon, will answer the same purpose, and so will marble slabs, but less agreeably to the operator. I use plate-glass for its cleanliness and the perfect flatness of its surface.

Lay your plate, well-cleaned, on one of these glasses, and have the others on the same table conveniently near. Now take your bottle of etching-paste, that is your Bosse ground made into paste with oil of lavender as already explained. See that there is no dust on your glasses. With a perfectly clean palette-knife take some of the paste and spread it equally on one of the glasses in a horizontal band about two inches broad. If the paste is too thick for this to be done easily, add a few drops of oil of lavender, and mix thoroughly well with the palette-knife. Now take your roller and roll over and over again until you spread a film of paste quite evenly on your glass. If the roller is rather over-charged with paste (you will easily judge of this after a few experiments) pass it once on the *other* glass to get rid of what is superfluous, then apply it to your copper. You ought to be able to lay a thin and perfectly even coat of paste by this means upon your copper.

When the paste is just of the right thickness and is the proper quantity it simply dulls the surface of the glass, making it of a dead pale brown. It ought not to look like treacle. You ought to hear a regular *crisp* sound as the roller passes over the glass. After some practice the ear will tell you when it is right.

The plate being now covered with a film of paste your next business is to expel the oil of lavender from the etching-ground. The oil was merely a *vehicle* like water in water-colour painting. It is easily got rid of by heating the plate gently over a spirit-lamp.\* When the ground

\* To do this, of course you hold the plate in a hand-vice, with a bit of paper to protect the polished side from the vice.



looks transparent and loses its dead surface, it has been sufficiently heated.

You may now cover the back of the plate with a little paste applied with the dabber.

Whilst the plate is still warm you smoke it. To do this you light your smoking taper (see preceding Chapter, § 7), and when there is a large flame, giving off smoke, hold your plate above it with the face downwards, in such a manner that the flame may just touch the etching-ground. Move the plate slowly in every direction, so that all parts of its surface may be smoked alike, and *none burnt*.

After a very little practice you will be able to ground a plate much more easily and incomparably more perfectly with the roller than you possibly could with the dabber.

*Grounding a plate for Rebiting.*—It is well to practise what has just been described before attempting to ground for rebiting, as much more skill is required.

The purpose of this process is to cover and protect the smooth surface of copper between the lines of a plate which has been already bitten, but insufficiently bitten, in order that the lines may be exposed again to the action of the acid, and deepened, without damaging the smooth spaces of copper and without incurring the great labour which would be necessary to clean the lines of the etching-ground with the point, if they were filled.

Having cleaned the plate thoroughly with schist-oil and whitening and bread, you lay it as before on one of the glasses and charge your roller with etching paste as before, taking especial care, however, this time that it is not over-charged, and removing what is superfluous by rolling on the second plate-glass if it is. You then pass the roller over the plate by simply *pushing* the handles with the thumbs, not *pressing* in the least, as that would fill the shallower lines. Roll over the plate twice in one direction, and then twice at right angles to the first direction. Nothing more must be done. If this has been done properly the smooth parts will be well covered and the lines will not be filled except perhaps a few of the very shallowest. You then expel the oil of lavender by means of heat, as before. You do not smoke this time. Protect the back of your plate as before, or with stopping-out varnish, and the edges also. You then stop out with the same varnish all those parts of the plate which are already sufficiently bitten, leaving the others to be acted upon by the acid.

The old-fashioned manner of rebiting was far inferior to this. The dabber was used, and instead of employing the etching-ground in a paste, according to the present practice, it was melted by heat on another copper-plate. The consequence of this clumsy arrangement was that shallow lines were often filled, and rebiting, except when very skilfully done, was in a great measure illusory. You could deepen the lines which did not want deepening, but not those which most needed it. The roller makes rebiting much more practical, indeed some modern etchers bite shallow at first on purpose, and do not give their extreme darks until they have seen a proof, when they get them by rebiting as required.





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possible) unless the artist desires to increase their breadth, when the acid ought to do what he wishes.

§ 4. The biting ought to be well under the control of the operator from beginning to end.

Now let me explain some causes which often prevent these desiderata from being realised.

First with regard to § 1. Etchers often suffer from the great annoyance of seeing their plate attacked unequally. Some lines will be quite deeply bitten, whilst others are not bitten at all. The consequence in the proof may be imagined. A plate which was harmonious in the drawing looks, in the printing, like the shattered fragments of a ruined inscription. All its tones, too, have gone wrong, and it must either be repaired at the cost of great labour, or else begun over again, with the risk of a similar misadventure. What is the reason for this? M. Flameng gave it as his opinion that the cause was too great adhesiveness in the ground; M. Greux, on the other hand, thought that the true reason was the state of the copper before the ground was laid, which in his own case he contended against by bathing it in acid and water, till water dropped upon it would *spread*, and not run off in globules. I suffered at one time greatly from this annoyance, so much that it seemed as if there were an evil spell upon my plates, for the acid attacked the lines irregularly here and there in patches, or one line would be bitten and the one next to it (although apparently drawn in the same way) would resist the action of the acid for several hours. I therefore made many experiments on etching-grounds, especially with regard to the quality of adhesiveness, and I found in accordance with M. Flameng's opinion that the less adhesiveness there was in the ground, the less was the liability to an irregular attack in the biting. This is why I recommend Bosse's ground. It is sufficiently adhesive but not too much so, and therefore the etching-point easily removes it from the true surface of the copper. When the adhesion is excessive, the paint may often leave a thin film of ground upon the copper not perceptible to the eye, but enough to defend it against acid. But in addition to this I took two other precautions. First, I determined that the surface of the copper should take water well before being grounded, and found that the following treatment effected this better than anything else.

1. Bathe the plate in the Dutch mordant (*see* Chap. IV.) for five minutes, or till it is all stained dark.

2. Wash it well in clean water.

3. Bathe it in a mixture of equal parts of liquid ammonia and water till the copper shows red all over.

4. Wash it well in clean water and leave it in the water for half-an-hour.

After this treatment the surface of the copper offers no resistance to water, but can be really *wetted*. It will therefore not resist an immediate attack of acid in the acid bath if laid bare by the point.

I dry the plate over the spirit-lamp and do not touch it with any rag.



but remove dust with a clean camel-hair brush just before applying the ground with the roller.

After adopting this system I had no more accidents of the kind described above, but to make assurance doubly sure I forced myself into the habit of cutting into the copper itself with the etching-point. If an etcher were always quite sure of doing this it would be unnecessary for him to trouble himself with precautions about the surface of the copper—he need not even clean it, but in the excitement of rapid work, especially when it is done from nature, one is apt to forget to cut into the copper, so that it is well to be sure about the state of its surface also. The reader is now in full possession of means which will enable him to contend against one of the greatest inconveniences which can occur to him.

Now as to the requirement § 2, regularity of operation. Is there danger of irregularity? Yes, there is. What are the causes of it? There are two or three causes, so we will take one at a time. One cause, then, is a difference of temperature. You have founded your calculations about the effects of biting upon an experiment performed under a certain temperature. You afterwards bite a plate under another temperature and are surprised to find the result different from what you expected it to be. But you ought not to be surprised, for temperature is like the regulator of a watch which makes it go fast or slowly. Heat makes the acid bath bite fast, cold makes it bite slowly. Evidently, then, there is a very simple way of obtaining regularity so far as heat can effect it, and that is to keep your bath artificially at the same heat by means of a thermometer and a lamp. I place my porcelain tray that contains the bath on the plate-warmer which is commonly used to warm plates for printing. I put the lamp under it and regulate the heat of the bath to ninety degrees Fahrenheit, just as if I were giving a warm bath to a delicate patient. I keep it steadily to that heat \* till the whole operation is over, and by this means, whether in the height of summer or the depth of winter, I know what is done in a given time. Here, again, one of the commonest causes of miscalculation is entirely obviated by the simplest means.

There is a peculiarity about biting with nitric acid which requires to be noted, for it cannot be got over. When many lines are close together, as in close shading, they bite sooner than when isolated. Biting begins in the closest work, and attacks the most isolated lines last. It creeps into some lines gradually by a sort of contagion from some piece of close shading, as an epidemic disease spreads into the thinly-peopled country from dense centres of population. The Dutch mordant and perchloride of iron both attack more regularly.

Another cause of miscalculation is this. The bath may be very strong at first and then rapidly weaken. I will take an extreme instance.

\* You need not put your thermometer into the acid. You can have a smaller vessel on the same plate-warmer, containing pure water as an indicator.



Suppose you apply nitric acid quite pure, with a brush ; the ebullition is most violent at the beginning and the action of the acid is tremendous, but in a short time its energy is expended, it has taken up so much copper that it can dissolve no more and you have simply a thick nitrate of copper lying on the surface of your plate. Here the energy is great at the beginning and gradually but swiftly lessens ; evidently, then, you are not to count upon the action of such a bath as if it were regularly continuous. The same thing occurs in all cold baths in minor degrees, and now how are we to combat it ?

First, we may observe that the quicker and more energetic the action, the quicker also is the decline of power in the bath, we, therefore, do well to choose mordants which operate slowly, such as the Dutch mordant. Again, the smaller the *quantity* of the mordant the sooner it becomes charged with copper and weakened in its action. It is, therefore, an excellent rule to have deep and large trays for the baths, and put a great quantity of mordant into them. We can also refresh the bath from time to time by pouring out a part of it and adding fresh mordant. Is there any means of ascertaining how much the bath has been weakened ? Yes, just as the thermometer informs you of its strength, so far as heat affects it, so the colour informs you of its condition as to absorption of copper. When it becomes of a very dark green you know that it has dissolved much copper and weakened itself accordingly. Therefore, just as you keep up to one temperature keep to one colour, a rich green, neither pale nor dark. Mind that the *depth* of the bath is always the same, or you will not be able to judge of the green. In the warm bath evaporation concentrates the chlorate solution and so counteracts the weakening.

We have said that the action of the bath ought not to stop altogether except at the will of the operator. The inexperienced reader will be much surprised to hear that such a thing ever occurs, but it does occur with all mordants. The lines, for some reason which we will endeavour to ascertain when speaking of the chemistry of etching, are hollowed down to a certain depth but then the acid strikes work and eats no farther. A safe practical precaution against this is to take your plate out of the Dutch mordant from time to time, put it in pure water of the same temperature (plenty of water in a big tray), wash it thoroughly for a quarter of an hour, and brush into all the lines lightly but effectually with a camel-hair brush. If we could add ammonia to the water it would be still better, but we cannot, because ammonia spoils the etching-ground and causes it to come off in flakes.

We may now pass to § 3. We said that the acid ought to eat the lines in *depth* and not in breadth (or as little as possible) unless the artist desires to increase their breadth, when the acid ought to do what he wishes.

This is almost entirely in our own power. Powerful acid baths which cause *ebullition*, as, for example, a strong nitric bath, greatly increase the breadth of lines whilst they bite. Baths which operate slowly and without ebullition, such as the Dutch mordant and perchloride of iron,





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to *underbite* them, for, if they are underbitten it is most difficult, if not altogether impossible, to rebite them, because you can hardly ever cover the plate with etching-ground without filling them up, whereas, on the other hand, they are very easily reduced when overbitten, either by charcoal or simply with the scraper and burnisher.

In concluding this part of the subject let me warn the reader against two evils common in the work even of clever men, *pitting*, and *rotten lines*. Pitting is the occurrence of involuntary dots which, if neglected, get very deeply bitten and cannot then be removed without spoiling the work round them—*rotten lines* are lines which were intended to be continuous, but which show interruptions and involuntary differences of quality.

Pitting may be due to impurities in the materials of which the etching-ground is composed, that is, there may be minute particles of foreign matter imperceptible to the naked eye but soluble in acid. Minute pitting is produced purposely in this way in aquatint engraving. Asphaltum, it appears, is usually more or less impure, containing various foreign substances which, being soluble in mordants, expose a plate to spotting. To purify asphaltum the following method has been proposed by M. Deleschamps. It may be powdered, and washed in water acidulated with hydrochloric acid. This dissolves the metallic oxides, and organic substances float on the surface and may be removed. The asphaltum is then dried, reduced to a very fine powder, and passed through a fine silk sieve; this retains the siliceous particles, and the asphaltum is now pure. White wax is occasionally adulterated with potato powder. It is quite pure in the *clear* ether solution, and accordingly, in my positive process, although the ground is of the most extreme tenuity, pitting *never* occurs. Pitting may sometimes be caused, when gelatine paper has been used for tracing, by the pressure of the burnisher, which has either penetrated the ground in consequence of little specks of roughness on the gelatine, or else removed adhesive little specks of roughness in the ground itself. Either cause is quite enough to expose the copper, and yet the naked eye may not perceive it. Now, although pitting may be of very little consequence in some parts of a plate, it may be its ruin if it occurs in others—in a face, for example. The best way to avoid it, after taking due precautions to get pure chemicals, is to put the plate, before biting seriously, into a weak mixture of nitric acid and water. Dutch mordant *darkens* lines, and pitting in a black ground is not perceptible to the eye when this mordant is used. Nitric acid cleans copper and shows it light. Whilst the plate is in the bath examine it well, and after a few minutes remove it to a bath of pure water and pass a camel-hair brush all over it. In the water you will discover pitting if it exists, but to help yourself use a strong magnifying-glass. Remove from the bath and stop-out all the spots with stopping-out varnish. The slight biting which has been caused by the weak nitric bath is easily removed with emery paper after the plate is bitten.

The commonest cause of rotten lines is this. The point, instead of removing the whole of the ground along its passage, has only partially



removed it, so that the copper has been protected here and there. Wherever it was protected there are necessarily interruptions. Another cause may be that some foreign substance has been allowed to get into the line after it was drawn—bits of loose etching-ground may have got into it, or grease of some kind, perhaps from the etcher's own fingers, if he has not used a hand-rest.

As a proof of what a very delicate affair biting is, let me tell the reader an anecdote. I had drawn two elaborate little plates and left them on my table, forgetting to put them in a protected place. A hot summer sun came and looked in upon them—the sun of a Burgundy July—and so the plates were heated and the ground softened. Still the drawing looked perfectly clear, so the plates were put into a cool place and resumed their former appearance. When it came to the biting, however, lo! it was impossible! The sun, in heating the plates, had caused *something* to ooze out of the etching-ground and varnish the lines—imperceptibly to the eye, but quite sufficiently to protect them against the acid bath. A plate which is drawn upon should be kept in a safe covered place until it is bitten, and should be bitten as soon as possible after it is drawn. Plates may be kept in shallow well-fitting drawers, or in wooden trays that may be laid one upon another.

It is a good precaution, whilst etching, to clear away all the loose bits of etching-ground with a camel-hair brush, so that you may not be tempted to use the little finger, which would often choke the line.

When you bite a plate with nitric acid, small bubbles of gas arise in the lines. If you leave these undisturbed, they will cause interruptions in the lines, because, where the gas-bubble protects the copper, the acid no longer bites. It is therefore necessary, in using the nitric bath, to remove these bubbles continually with a small feather.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### STOPPING-OUT.

THE best stopping-out varnish has been already described at the end of the Chapter on Grounds and Varnishes, and also the way to use it, but I wish to add a few practical hints which may be of service.

It is a good principle to keep lengths of biting very distinct from each other. It is not wise to trust to biting much for gradation. Minute differences of shade can hardly ever be insured by stopping-out. For example, if an etcher were to stop-out after every five minutes of exposure to the Dutch mordant, much of his labour would be thrown away.

Let me be quite absolutely frank with the practical reader on this subject. Some account of personal experience is best in a matter of this kind.

In *theory* a shade bitten twenty minutes and a shade of exactly the



same kind bitten thirty minutes, ought to be very different in the printing—the latter ought to be much the darker of the two. In practice they may be exactly the same.

I was etching a plate at the beginning of this year, after many years of experience in these matters, and it had a dark back-ground entirely shaded in the same way. To get two different shades I bit half the back-ground for twenty, and the other half for thirty minutes. The result in the printed proof was a shade of *precisely the same tone and quality throughout*.

But now observe a very curious thing. I lowered the whole surface of the copper with charcoal, and by this means got the difference of shade which I desired, for now the part which had been bitten thirty minutes showed distinctly as much darker than the other.

What did this prove? It proved that the part which had remained longer than the other in the acid had really been bitten deeper, but at the same time there was the evidence of the first printed proof that this difference of depth in the lines made no difference in the printing.

Again. It has happened to me not once nor twice, but many times, to try to get gradations in skies by stopping-out narrow bands from the horizon upwards as the biting proceeded, and yet the result has been that the shade was pretty nearly the same all over, so that the stopping-out was a waste of time, for one biting would have sufficed for the result obtained.

These are facts of positive experience, not theories. They are directly contrary to the received theory of the subject. Can we get a sound explanation of these facts?

A deep etched line does not deliver all its ink to the paper. The evidence of this is that when a proof has just been taken, the plate still remains so much charged with ink that much ink comes out of the lines if we cleanse them with petroleum and a brush. A narrow line, moderately deep, gives as much ink to the paper as it can give, and you will not make the line any blacker by deepening it still farther.

When lines are much widened at the same time that they are deepened, they give off more ink because the paper is forced more into them. In Turner's etchings the lines are *embossed* by the press. It follows from this that with effervescing mordants, such as the nitric bath, which widen the lines, finer distinctions of biting may be usefully observed than with the quiet mordants which widen the line but little.

My advice is not to stop-out a plate more than twice or three times before removing the ground and taking a proof. I have often been asked by young etchers to give some fixed scheme of biting for their guidance. I adapt the following from a paper which I wrote and fastened on the wall of my own laboratory. The reader will perceive that it is for an elaborate plate, a simple one may be carried through with much less trouble. The reader will also perceive that very few bitings are given before a proof is taken, and that the plate is often proved.





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parts may require to be better brought together, it may be wanting in that great quality of art—unity. This is to be attained most easily by careful retouching of parts, when you can see the whole of what has been already done, and in order to do that, the plate ought to be covered with a transparent, or what is called a “white” ground (*see* Chapter on Grounds). But here we have to encounter a very serious difficulty. It is very easy to apply a safe white ground to a smooth plate, but very difficult to make it safe on a plate where there are deep lines already. The reason is that the ground is always very thin and weak (unless great care is taken) on the jagged edges of the hollows, which are soon exposed to the action of acid, and when once they are attacked the disease spreads rapidly. Suppose a plain traversed by deep ditches and covered with snow. There may be plenty of snow in the ditches and on the flat surface, but there will not be so much just on the angle between the two. The safest way is to apply the white ground with the brush, plentifully, as it fills the hollows well, and when one coat is dry you can give a second, using the brush at right angles to the first direction in which you used it. If heat is used to expel the oil of lavender, it must be with the greatest care, and only just enough for the purpose, for when the ground is melted it always by a sort of repulsion, avoids those very edges and angles which most need its protection. Suppose, however, that you have succeeded in covering your plate safely, the next thing is to etch upon it, and by far the most convenient way for seeing what you do is to put the plate in a bath of Dutch mordant, not heated this time (as it is not desirable that its action should be accelerated) and do what you have to do whilst the plate is in the bath, using a fine needle (which the acid itself will keep sharp for you) and beginning with the darkest parts, passing gradually to the lightest. When the last are finished you must take the plate out *at once* and get a proof. Old-fashioned etchers always treat this process as if it were merely a display of temerity (as if one made displays of temerity in the solitude of his own laboratory), but there are most substantial reasons for its use. In the first place what you do in the transparent ground becomes immediately visible, because the Dutch mordant darkens the line as soon as it is drawn, and so lets you see it in its relation to other lines. Next, you can get various depths of biting at different parts of your work, without the time and labour of several different stoppings-out. Whatever may be the (not very valuable) opinion of those who have never tried it, I recommend this part of the process after much personal experience of its utility.

§ 6. The plate is now nearly finished, but a certain refinement may be given to it by the use of the dry point, that is by engraving with a steel point sharpened to a cutting edge. In light parts the very thin pure lines which can be got by this means are often of great value, especially in skies. In darker parts, the bur raised by the instrument is useful for a certain softness and richness, but it is not much to be relied upon if a large edition has to be printed.

This sketch of a system of etching is merely intended as a guide for



beginners in elaborate plates. A proficient artist usually goes on without method, and employs this or that process just when he needs it or thinks it would suit the convenience of the moment. In working from nature one cannot wait for successive bitings, everything has to be drawn whilst there is an opportunity for drawing it. The consequence is that stopping-out, in these cases, becomes a long and tedious business ; to do it well you require a very fine small camel-hair brush, fluid stopping-out varnish, and endless patience. The task, for instance, of separating, by stopping-out, the branches of a tree in the foreground from those of others behind it in the middle distance, could never be performed satisfactorily by a hurried or irritable artist.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AUXILIARIES.

§ 1. The Dry Point, mentioned in the last chapter, and to which I shall return in a chapter devoted specially to its use, is an auxiliary of great value which all approve and recognise. There are, however, other auxiliaries more or less generally approved of. (*See Chapter XII.*)

§ 2. *The Burin*.—Much may often be done with the engraver's burin to correct or reinforce a plate, especially in the shadows, but even if the artist has the skill to use this very difficult instrument, he is much exposed to a serious artistic danger. He may put so much burin work into a plate that he will not be able to harmonise it properly with the etched work, and then there will be the fatal result of ruin by discord, like the permanent misery of a quarrelling married couple. It is not six months since I engraved a sky altogether with the burin, and had to efface it entirely, because of its technical dissonance with the etched work in the same plate, though the engraved sky was of better quality in many respects than the etched one which I substituted for it. The burin is often extremely tempting for re-touches, as you have not to take trouble about re-grounding and biting, and you see what you do at once. Burins are kept very sharp, and pushed with the palm of the hand.

§ 3. *The Roulette*.—This is a very little wheel with a broad circumference, which is cut into sharp points. As the wheel runs on the surface of the copper it makes dots, all of which are visible in the printed proof. It raises a small bur, which has exactly the quality of mezzotint, and in fact *is* mezzotint.

Many lovers of etching have a strong prejudice against the roulette, but I notice that they sometimes admire the result obtained, whilst blaming the means used as illegitimate. Some artists have used it beautifully in combination with a simple kind of line etching, which it supports very well. Hervier's sketches of boats are charming instances of this, and so is at least one etching by Villevieille, called "En Picardie." They worked, in fact, exactly on the same principle as Turner did when



he etched the *Liber Studiorum* plates to be finished in mezzotint, the only difference being that the roulette is employed more lightly as a sort of sketched mezzotinting. It ought to be used rather sparingly, and in subordination to the etched lines, to sustain them.

§ 4. The *Berceau*.—This is the regular instrument used to produce mezzotint. It is an expensive tool (worth about 30s.), and is used simply by rocking it from side to side like a cradle (whence the name). It produces points in great numbers (more than a hundred at each movement), and these make a soft dark or rich black in the proof. They have generally to be lowered with the scraper to paler tints. The professional mezzotint engravers attain wonderful skill in the art of getting different tones by this means. Mezzotint does not stand large editions well, but if the *berceau* is used on the grounded plate and the dots *bitten*, then they will print as long as etched lines. The effect is not so rich, but it is more in harmony with bitten lines.

To get an intense black with the *berceau* it is necessary to go over the same place very many times, holding the tool successively to all the points of the compass.

§ 5. The *Cravate*.—This is Daubigny's name for an auxiliary which may be mentioned. Cover the plate with etching-paste with the roller, filling up the lines already etched, and then lay upon it a piece of taffetas silk. Go over this with the burnisher or pass it once through the press. Then remove it, and leave the etching-paste just as it remains on the plate for two or three days to dry. Now stop out all parts which you intend to leave quite white, and subject the other parts to the action of the Dutch mordant, which will bite a granular tint upon the plate. You stop out successively the parts which seem to you sufficiently bitten. This only gives a succession of flat tints, but some gradation may be afterwards introduced by the scraper and burnisher. Fine new muslin may be used in certain plates, or parts of plates.

§ 6. The *Soft Ground*.—The old soft ground process may be used as an auxiliary. Etching ground was mixed with an equal quantity of tallow, and applied with a dabber, and smoked in the usual way. A sheet of paper with a grain was then laid on the plate, and the artist worked with a pencil on the paper. The paper when removed took away the ground where the pencil had passed, and the acid in the bath bit the copper into a sort of grain like a lithograph. In using the process as an auxiliary it is best to begin with it and use the line work afterwards in the usual way.

§ 7. *Flat Sulphur Tints*. Oil the plate liberally with olive oil, and blow flour of sulphur upon this; the sulphur if allowed to remain on the plate will produce a flat tint more or less deep in proportion to the time it remains. I have a great dislike to sulphur tints *all over* a plate, for they are very heavy and dead, but they may sometimes be used with good effect in deeply shaded parts. Some of Appian's best plates owe a great deal of their charm to them. They are valuable for evening effects, to sustain deeply bitten lines, when they produce the effect of highly artificial printing.





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artist is skilful, but there is the disadvantage that he cannot correct whilst he is at work, so that every stroke prints, neither can he reserve small points of light in masses of shade which can so easily be done with stopping-out varnish in the old process. My positive process is, however, quite perfect and convenient in its own way, and has been greatly approved of by some eminent artists, but it is not suitable for beginners, who ought to be able to correct, and who cannot expect to calculate with much accuracy the effect of biting upon each line when they make it. An artist who etched (let us say) in Mr. Haden's manner would find the positive process useful, and able to give what he wanted better than the old process, because he could get many different depths of line without stopping-out ; but an artist who desired to etch like the engraver-etchers who copy pictures, would find the constant march of the acid too embarrassing for him.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE CHEMISTRY OF ETCHING.*

A FEW brief chemical notes may be of use to the reader. Professor Barff, of the Royal Academy, has very kindly answered my questions on this subject, and so have other scientific friends ; it is therefore hoped that these notes may be relied upon.

All chemicals used in the etcher's laboratory should be in the pure state in which they are sold to scientific chemists for experiments.

§ 1. *Hydrochloric Acid*.—When pure this acid is white and smokes very little or not at all. The common hydrochloric acid of commerce often smokes so much that it is quite unsuitable for use in the etcher's laboratory, and especially in the positive process. This acid smokes more in hot weather than in cold, and more when there is ammonia in the atmosphere than when there is not any ammonia. However white it may be, it will turn yellow after contact with iron. The impure acid usually sold by druggists contains different things which do not much affect its powers as a mordant, but only the pure acid is agreeable to use. The worst is simply intolerable. Its yellow colour may be caused by the presence of iron, or it may be yellow from the presence of free chlorine gas.

§ 2. *Action of the Dutch Mordant*.—This mordant, as we see in the positive process, stains the copper of a dark colour, which looks positively black by contrast with the silver, and is in fact a dark red purple. The copper is stained so deeply that you cannot rub the stain away without removing some portion of the copper itself.

The dark stain is sub-chloride or sub-oxide of copper.

The chlorate of potash in the mordant produces chlorine *à l'état naissant*.



The work of the hydrochloric acid is to effect the disengagement of chlorine.

Chlorate of potash is a magazine of chlorine, charged with it as much as possible. It is this chlorine which, being disengaged by the acid, acts upon the copper.

The chlorine has probably a double action. It may simultaneously attack the copper directly, forming chloride of copper, and take up the hydrogen of the water, setting oxygen at liberty, *à l'état naissant*, which forms, with the metal, an oxide of copper. The hydrochloric acid may dissolve this oxide. It has little action on the pure metal.

I have endeavoured to ascertain whether the Dutch mordant can be prejudicial to the health of the operator, especially when he works in the positive process. Enchlorine is given off, which is a very powerful body, and which, untampered, would be dangerous. On the other hand, if the laboratory is well-ventilated there is nothing to fear. In a small quantity chlorine is positively useful as a disinfectant and preservative against epidemic disease. In case of suffering from its use in an ill-ventilated laboratory, the proper antidote is milk.

§ 3. *Action of Dutch Mordant and Ammonia in preparing plates.*—In the chapter on biting I gave an account of a way of treating plates by Dutch mordant and ammonia as a preparation for etching. I now explain the chemical action.

The Liquid Ammonia dissolves the salt of copper which the Dutch mordant has formed on the surface of the plate (that is the sub-chloride or sub-oxide of copper). At the same time it lays the metallic copper bare and free from all impurity.

§ 4. *Use of water in the Dutch Mordant.*—Water is essential for the preservation of the chlorine in the chlorate of potash until it can act upon the copper. If hydrochloric acid is poured upon chlorate of potash in crystals without the intervention of water, enchlorine is given off in dense fumes, and the qualities of chlorate of potash are no longer available. It is necessary to dissolve the chlorate first in water before adding the acid. Water is both a vehicle and a moderating and conservative element in the mordant.

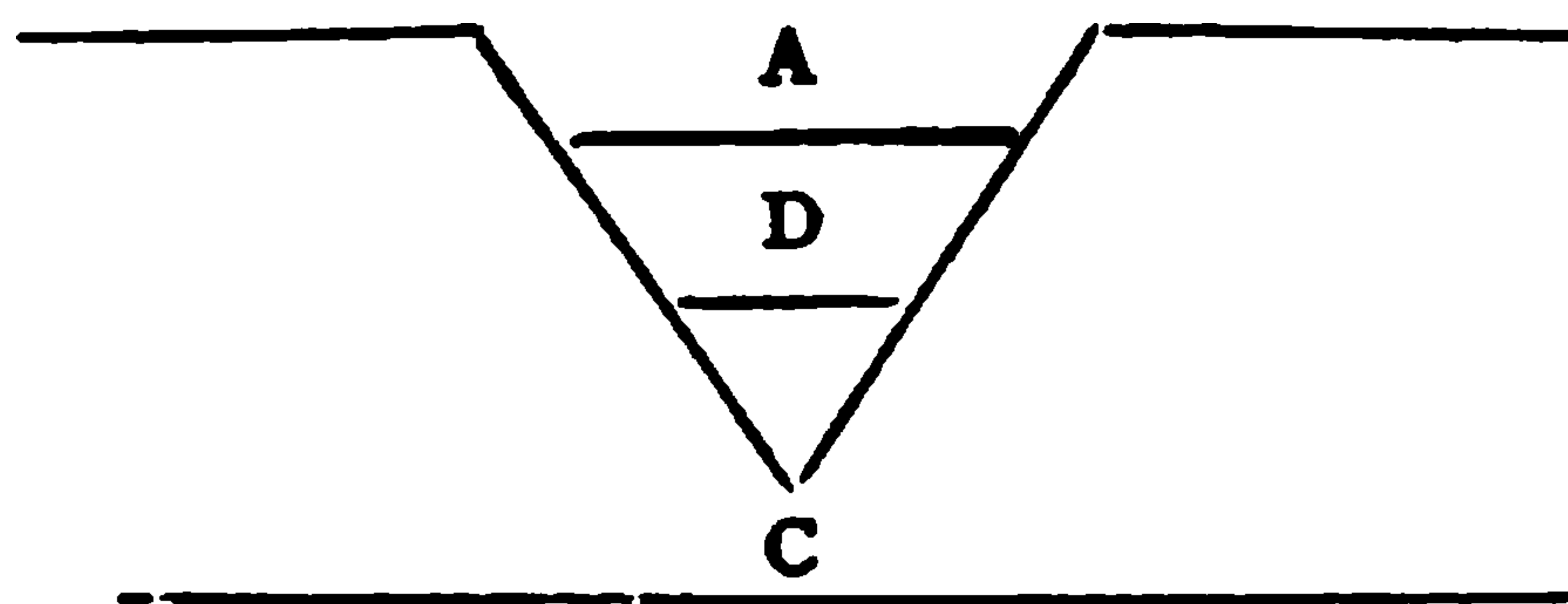
§ 5. *Action of Nitric Acid upon Copper.*—Nitric acid first oxidises and then dissolves the copper. It does not darken the lines in biting them as the Dutch mordant does by producing the sub-chloride of copper.

§ 6. *Arrested Bitings.*—This very unpleasant phenomenon, the despair of etchers, is chemically explained as follows :—

\* There may be something more than this. A French friend offers the following as a hypothesis. “ L'oxyde de cuivre attaqué par l'ammoniaque doit donner de l'azotate de cuivre, et en dépôt du cuivre pur en poudre. L'oxygène de l'oxyde de cuivre se porte en partie sur l'azote de l'ammoniaque pour former de l'acide azotique qui s'unit à ce qui reste de l'oxyde de cuivre et forme l'azotate de cuivre. Pure copper is oxidised in the presence of ammonia, and the oxide is then dissolved. Ammonia is thus a real mordant, but it cannot be employed as such, because it injures the etching-ground.



By allowing the mordant to remain long undisturbed on the copper, a coat of oxide gets formed which is not dissolved as the acid solvent is weakened.



Suppose this to represent a magnified section of a plate, and A C the depth of a line, the oxide lodges at the bottom, between C and D. At D you have a solution of chloride or nitrate of copper according as you use the

Dutch mordant or nitric acid, and at A you have the pure liquid. The specific gravity of the liquid at D is greater than that of the liquid at A, so it remains in the hollow, and the action is to a great degree retarded, if not altogether arrested. The remedy suggested is washing at intervals in distilled water and the addition of fresh mordant to the bath. There is potash in the chlorate, and this, as chloride, will make the liquid thick, and impede, after a time, the solvent powers of the hydrochloric acid.\*

§ 7. *Perchloride of Iron*.—The action of perchloride of iron on copper is essentially the same as that of the Dutch mordant. It produces chloride of copper, and probably also oxide of copper, which it dissolves.

§ 8. *Effect of Iron on lines in the Dutch Mordant*.—The dark lines in a plate covered with Dutch mordant may at any time be turned to a light copper colour by touching the plate with an iron instrument. It is suggested that in the presence of the iron the oxygen in the oxide of copper flies to the iron, but what becomes of the sub-chloride?

§ 9. *Composition of Silver Cream to Silver Plates for the Positive Process*. With the help of a scientific friend I have tried to imitate Levi's original *crème d'Argent* and succeeded perfectly. As this *crème d'Argent* has not been procurable since the war of 1870 (when the inventor probably died), the reader may be glad to know how to make it.

The first thing is to procure chloride of silver. This may be done as follows:—

Pour 60 grammes of nitric acid into a tumbler, and add the same quantity of water. Put the tumbler into a small pan half filled with water, which you set over the flame of a spirit-lamp. Throw a shilling into the tumbler, and let the mordant boil five minutes. Remove from the fire, and let the contents of the tumbler cool. The shilling will now be entirely dissolved.

When the solution is cool, add to it 120 grammes of pure water, and then pour into it, drop by drop, 25 grammes of hydrochloric acid. This will immediately produce a white precipitate. Now transfer the whole into a large glass and add pure cold water liberally, stirring well with a

\* One chemist suggests that if the Dutch mordant is used, it may be a good precaution to immerse the plate from time to time in a weak nitric mordant, after washing it well with distilled water.





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## CHAPTER XII.

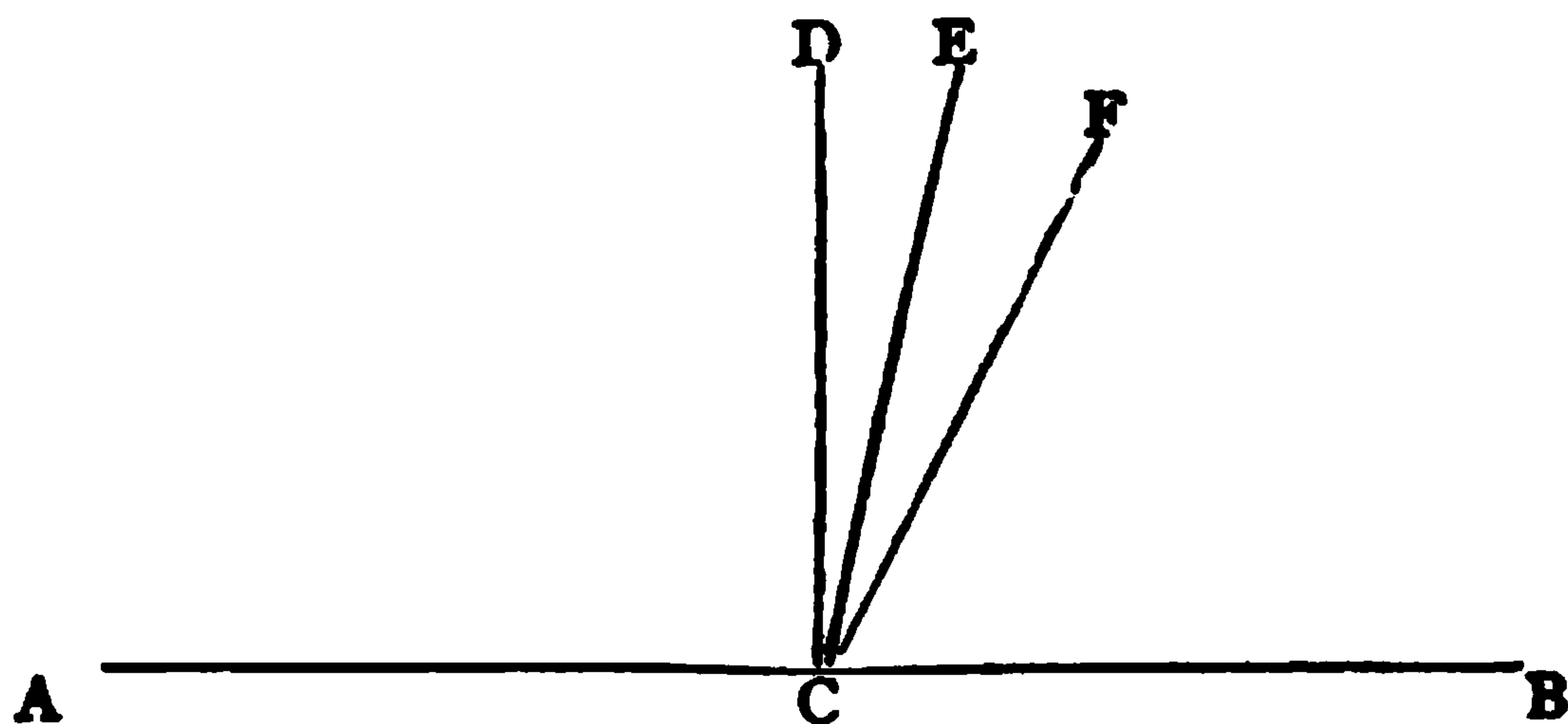
## DRY-POINT.

PLATES are sometimes engraved in pure dry-point with the bur left to catch the printer's ink. This is not really etching, so it shall be passed very briefly here, but it is an etcher's process, and therefore must be mentioned.

The bur is the ridge raised by the tool as it ploughs the copper. When it catches too much ink it is reduced with the scraper till it takes just enough. The scraper must be used very cautiously.

A mixture of tallow and lamp black is rubbed into the lines as the work proceeds, that the workman may see what he is doing.

The raising of the bur does not simply depend upon the amount of pressure exercised, but also on the angle at which the needle is held.



Let A B be the plate, and C D, C E, C F, the graver held in different positions. With the exercise of precisely the same amount of force a line drawn with the graver as at C D will be weaker than a line drawn with the graver as at C E, and C F will draw a blacker line still, because it will raise a higher bur. The inclination of the graver is of course always made to the right. The line A B is supposed to be the plate on which the reader is working. He is recommended to make experiments on inclination in this way, and to take proofs in a press, that he may see the result. An hour so spent will teach him more than a page of theory. It is evident that without knowing this fact about inclination a dry-point engraver is always liable to unintentional variations of force if he relies upon bur for his effect. In cases where bur is not the object, inclination is of much less consequence.

The reader must not think of dry-point as a thin and meagre art. It may be made to look very rich, and this is not surprising when we consider that it is really *mezzotint in line*, for the effect is got by bur both in dry-point and in mezzotint. The hand is not nearly so free as it is in etching, and this objection, together with the serious one that dry-points will not safely yield large editions, has caused etchers' dry-point to be much neglected.\*

\* With regard to this question of printing, I may observe that my large dry-



Engravers' dry-point is done on different principles. In this the bur is removed. An etcher may use it occasionally amongst his etched lines in a manner very nearly resembling etching. Mr. Ruskin uses it very skilfully in this way.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### PRINTING

A FEW brief notes on printing seem necessary in this place, but the subject is much too large to be treated with any thoroughness here. It occupies more than 300 closely printed pages in Roret's *Encyclopædia*. If the reader wishes to pursue the subject further, and can read technical French, he should get the little volume, which may be had separately.\*

I presume that the etcher merely wishes to prove his plate and does not care to print editions. If he desires to print a few proofs of his own plates for sale he must apprentice himself for a week or ten days to a good professional printer accustomed to print etchings for good artists.

The following brief directions are all that is needed for proving. Heat your plate on the plate-heater (Chap. V., § 31) until it is nearly as warm as the hand can bear, then take up some printing-ink with a palette knife, lay it on a corner of the plate-heater, and add a drop or two of boiled linseed oil if it is too stiff to be easily dealt with. You then take the dabber (Chap. V., § 28), take some of the printing-ink up with it, and ink your plate all over, driving the ink thoroughly well into the lines. For the first proof it is even necessary to rub the ink well into the lines with your finger. In using the dabber apply it with a strong rocking motion all over the plate. Do not strike the copper with it, and never slip or slide it on the copper.

When the plate is well inked all over take a piece of printers' canvas crushed together in a large lump, but lightly, and wipe the plate with it till the ink is in great part removed from the surface. To clear margins and parts that are required to come quite white it is usual to employ a rag damped with weak acidulated water which has potash in it and (in

point, in the first edition of *Etching and Etchers*, called *Two Stumps of Driftwood*, gave 1000 copies (after being steeled) without perceptible wearing. On the other hand, a plate of mine called *The Tower of Vauthot* was intended for the *Portfolio*, but, by M. Flameng's advice, was not published in that periodical, because it was found difficult to print it without injury beyond the first 100 proofs on Japanese paper. This latter plate was an etching, but the whole of its effect was due to work with the dry point.

\* *Encyclopédie Roret, Manuel de l'Imprimeur en Taille-douce*, prix 3 francs. Paris, Librairie Encyclopédique de Roret, Rue Hautefeuille, No. 10 bis. The reader will also find a good deal of curious technical information about etching and engraving in another volume of the same collection, entitled "*Graveur*."



France) a little quick-lime. The water is acidulated with nitrous acid. The proportions used vary according to the taste of different workmen, but this mordant must never be strong.

The plate is then cleaned as far as the printer intends with the soft part of his right hand, which has been previously chalked by being passed over a lump of Spanish white (the hand must not be overcharged with chalk). The margin is cleaned with a rag chalked in the same way.

To ascertain the *exact state* of a plate it is necessary to clean it all over, leaving no ink except what is in the lines, as visiting-cards are printed. It is a good thing to do this for the first proof simply for self-information.

But to ascertain what the plate is *capable* of rendering, it may be treated artificially by what is called artistic printing.

The two kinds of printing are quite different from each other, and a plate may be etched for one or for the other. We will distinguish them here as mechanical and artistic printing. Remember the visiting-card as the example of the first. I cannot so easily name an example of the second, because I cannot be sure that all artistic proofs of the same plate are equal in quality to those which are accessible to me. However, I will try to fix upon an example of the second, and it shall be the Laughing Portrait of Rembrandt by Flameng, which was printed with extraordinary care and skill by Salmon for the *Portfolio*. It appeared in the number for January 1872. The printing of that plate was so highly artificial that the workman could only take a few proofs per day.\*

Artificial or artistic printing has often been much disliked by artists, because when badly done it is intolerable. Mr. Ruskin condemns it altogether. Mr. Haden condemned it at one time, but has probably changed his opinion since, for the Agamemnon is printed very artificially. I too have had my time of rebellion against it, caused by ignorant and tasteless work which pretended to be artistic, and only succeeded in obscuring the intention of the etcher. The plain truth is, that when done with ability, skill, and taste, artistic printing is a wonderful help to certain etchings, and that some eminent modern etchers work intentionally in view of it. The Laughing Rembrandt, for example, was etched on purpose to be printed artificially, so that the only proofs which express Flameng's intention are artistic proofs. On the other hand, etchings may be done expressly to be printed like visiting-cards; for example, those of Mr. Ernest George, and those of mine in the first edition of my *Etcher's Handbook*, were etched to be so printed. In such cases the brilliance of the white paper between the lines is counted upon as a part of the effect, and must not be obscured by the printer, whose business is simply to make every line clear and black.

\* The whole edition was printed with the care usually given to a choice proof, and under M. Flameng's personal supervision. All parties made some sacrifices about the plate (publisher, printer, etcher) as a work of exceptional character and importance. If the reader could see a bad or weak proof of the same plate he would be very much astonished.





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tween different sheets of blotting-paper, when you may use it at once. It is a good precaution with all foreign papers except Japanese and Indian, to brush them with a clothes-brush just before taking the proof. It disengages the fibre at the surface, and better disposes it for penetrating into the lines.

For proving a plate, pass it *once* through the press to take the proof, and not once and back before lifting the paper, as printers do; because that often more or less perceptibly doubles the lines, and you want to ascertain the exact truth about your lines.

See that your press, if a large one, is well supplied with four or five good soft cloths to lay between the roller and your paper. Proofs *may* be taken with two if they are thick and good.

If the paper slips along the plate and creases, the reason always is too much friction somewhere in the press. Find out what causes the friction, and remedy it. Keep axles well oiled.

It is a mistake to suppose that proofs are better for *excessive* pressure. There is a certain (very considerable) degree of pressure which is necessary to a good proof, but anything beyond it does no good and may create inconvenience, if only by making the press more difficult to work.

When proving a plate it is very useful to take an off-track. This is a paler copy of the proof, printed *from it* in reverse immediately after it is taken. You simply put the fresh proof in the press instead of the plate and lay damped paper upon it. You get an impression in reverse, that is in the same sense as the copper itself, and this considerably facilitates reference for retouches. In etching directly from nature without the mirror your drawing comes in reverse in the printing, so that there can be no local resemblance. If anybody in the neighbourhood asks for a proof, you will have to give him an off-track, or he will not recognise the place.

To dry proofs you require thick, soft, porous pasteboards (made on purpose), always kept very clean, of course, and you put your proofs between these boards under the pressure of a screw-press or heavy weights. Do not put more than two proofs between two boards, and let the proofs be back to back, with their faces to the boards. The principle of drying proofs is exactly that of drying plants for an herbarium, for they have to be dried and kept flat at the same time. Herbarium paper and a botanist's drying-press would do, but boards are preferred for the more certain flattening of the whole sheet on which the etching is printed. A sheet of herbarium paper may be laid on the pasteboard to prevent it from receiving an off-track from an etching which is thickly printed. Change the pasteboards once, and keep them, when not in use, where there is a current of air to dry them. They should then be arranged with a space between every two of them for the air to pass freely over both sides.

When you have done with printing for the day, be careful to clean the plate thoroughly with petroleum, schist oil, benzine, or turpentine, so that no ink may be left in the lines. It would harden there and be difficult to get out afterwards.



**PLATE XII.**

**POPLARS AND OAK, a sketch from nature.**

**By P. G. HAMERTON.**



PLATE XII.

(To be placed opposite page 444.)

POPLARS AND OAK, a sketch from nature,

By P. G. Hamerton.

This little sketch is given as an example of a rapid and convenient way of working directly from nature on the copper. The author first drew all the organic markings, including the deepest indications of shade, out of doors in a sitting of two hours, but nothing more. The remaining history of the plate is given below.

BITINGS.

In Dutch Mordant, heated to 90° Fahrenheit.	Minutes.
Outlines of clouds . . . . .	10
Organic lines in trees, and marks of deepest shading in them .	40
Darkest organic lines and markings in shrubs and water .	60
<p>First proof taken. The plate in this stage consisted of nothing but organic lines and markings, with some indication of its deepest shades.</p> <p>It was now covered again with the black ground. The sky was shaded in horizontal lines, the whole of the water was shaded in vertical lines, and the rising ground in the distance was shaded in crossed lines. Lights on the water were stopped out with the brush.</p> <p>The sky was now bitten in a gradation of stoppings out from four to sixteen minutes, the rising ground was bitten eight minutes, and the vertical shading on the water from ten minutes to twenty.</p> <p>The plate is purposely not retouched in any way.</p>	
<p>Second proof taken.</p> <p>A more finished appearance might easily be given to it by the judicious use of the scraper and the dry-point.</p>	
<p>There are some rotten lines in the sky, occasioned by their having been drawn with too light a hand. They could easily have been corrected with the burin.</p>	
<p>This etching is printed very simply, being cleanly wiped. The water and foreground shrubs are <i>retroussés</i>.</p>	





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## CHAPTER XIV.

*THE INTERPRETATION OF NATURE.*

SEVERAL correspondents have requested me to write them a chapter on the interpretation of nature in etching, showing the best means of rendering this or that kind of natural material. Such a subject would require a volume, with innumerable references to the works of etchers, and a thorough analysis of their ways of execution. I have already been tempted to extend the present volume considerably beyond the limits of the first edition, and could not without making it burdensome, include a treatise on the interpretation of nature. I rather suspect, too, that amateurs who want information of this sort are often in that peculiar stage of art-culture when people believe that useful recipes can be given for "doing trees" etc. The only really valuable and generally applicable piece of advice which I can give is to select some good etcher whom you really like, get two or three of his plates and copy them rigorously in facsimile. That will compel you to observe what methods of interpretation were adopted by the etcher you have selected for your master, and whilst you are at work copying, you may apply your mind to the closest study of his ways. Very likely they will not suit you altogether, very likely it will seem to you that the etcher might have done otherwise and done better, which only means that you have a different idiosyncrasy from his. When you are tired of him you may copy somebody else, and when tired of copying etch directly from nature, only trying to think how your master would have interpreted the sort of material before you. It is a great thing that you should be firmly persuaded that interpretation is always necessary. Good art is always interpretative, and good etching is most especially so. The true and sound principles upon which the interpretation of nature in etching ought to be founded have been stated on pages 251 and 252 of this volume, especially in the quotations there. The leading ideas of good etching are the interpretation of nature by the selection of the most important lines and the separation of the most important masses, with a suggestion of the most characteristic details. But no teacher can convey to a pupil the faculty to make these selections, and yet on that faculty the whole value of his interpretation must depend. Therefore it is that such a book as this can never make an artist, but it may render humble service to one who is already born with the true gift. And if any such truly enviable favourite of Nature should by chance get hold of the book in future years, let me wish him strength and long life to continue greatly the tradition of a great art, an art which existed in all its majesty some centuries before we were born, and which, in spite of coldness and indifference, will survive as long as there is copper to make a plate and acid to bite it.









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stout board, each board having a hinge of its own. The etchings are pasted to these boards by the upper edge only. This system is good for a public collection, but not so good for a private one. The private owner often shows his treasures to several friends at once, and then it is desirable that they should be separate, and not pasted in a book.

The box with shelves, is merely a box which opens like a cupboard. Inside it is arranged with shelves, which can easily be drawn out. The shelves should be of very thin light wood, plain deal is best, or cedar for a *cabinet de grand luxe*.

Of the three systems, the last is quite incomparably the best. The portfolio does sufficiently for a collection in its infancy, but portfolios are awkward things, and become shabby in time, which gives a collection an untidy appearance. You would require a great number of portfolios for anything like a considerable collection. We all begin with them, of course, but a time comes when they get too full, and too shabby, and then is the time to set up the box system.

The most convenient way is to have the little boxes or cupboards of one uniform height, so that you can build them up like stones in a wall. Sixteen inches may be fixed upon for the height. As for the other dimensions, they will depend upon the size of the mounts, of which more presently. The little cupboards or boxes should have folding doors like an herbarium cabinet, and (*please take note of this*) the doors should be so arranged by the cabinet-maker that when the boxes are built up like stones in a wall, each little pair of doors shall open quite easily, without catching their neighbours.

Having once carefully decided about the sort of box to be adopted, you get the cabinet-maker to make enough of them for your present wants, and then add others of the same kind as your collection increases. The collection will thus always present a neat and uniform appearance.

The shelf should be an inch larger than the mount in each direction. Do not waste space in having clumsy thick shelves. For the two smaller sizes given below, the shelf need only be three-sixteenths of an inch thick, for the largest but one it may be four-sixteenths, and for the very largest five-sixteenths.

There may be ten shelves in each box. It is desirable for order and convenience to have many shelves, and few etchings on each of them.

Now about the mounts. They are made to order of any size, but it is far more convenient to take the sizes which are always kept in stock by the artists' colourmen. I therefore give four sizes which include all that is ever necessary, except for some very exceptional plate, such as Mr. Haden's *Calais Pier*, after Turner, which ought to be framed and hung on a wall; besides, it is not mentioned in the present catalogue. For a very rich collection the mounts should be hand-made,—the best in the world are Whatman's hand-made mounting-boards. More ordinary machine-made English boards are still quite good enough, and they now make boards in Germany from wood-paper which are extremely economical and still look very decent.



The following are the sizes required :—

Demy	.	.	Size 18 × 14 (4 sheet).
Royal	.	.	„ 22 × 17½ (4 sheet).
Imperial	.	.	„ 28 × 20 (6 sheet).
Atlas	.	.	„ 31½ × 24½ (6 sheet).

The Atlas boards will only be found necessary for such plates as the large ones by Flameng after Rembrandt, but a well-ordered collection ought to be able to give lodging to these, and to the big Rembrandts, without treating them shabbily. Of the four sizes the Royal is most generally useful, the Demy is given for small etchings, because it is a positive injury to them to give them *too* much margin, they look lost in the middle of a great board.

To mount an etching so as to make it enter into a regularly ordered collection, you begin by cutting the margin to within an inch or less of the plate mark all round. An inch is enough for large plates, and half-an-inch for small ones, others may vary between the two. You then very carefully paste, with stiff paste, about a quarter of an inch of the top edge of the paper, so as to fasten it to the board, but leaving the rest free. There is no other really satisfactory way of mounting etchings. If fastened by the four corners they pucker in damp weather.

Many of the modern etchings in this catalogue can be easily procured through the printsellers; the older ones may be met with occasionally, and at sales. The collector ought not to be discouraged because his collection is incomplete—the pleasure is to have an incomplete collection, to which one adds a good impression from time to time. If the reader cannot easily procure all the etchings in this Catalogue, he may often supply the place of them temporarily by copies, or by photographs, or photo-engravings, such as those by the Amand-Durand process. (*See* page 109, *footnote*). When these cannot be got the place may be temporarily supplied by a careful tracing, which will remind you of the plate. Unfortunately, in the great public collections, tracing is not permitted, but sketching is, and a sketch of the original, on the same scale, is much better than nothing. To have a perfect collection of originals is, in these days, a luxury for Barons de Rothschild or Dukes of Westminster, yet comparatively poor men may have very interesting though incomplete collections. The great thing is to enjoy and appreciate the few good things we have, and to enjoy the pleasure of gradually adding to them.

Many readers may wonder that French and English are mixed up in the titles of etchings here. They are so chiefly for convenience of reference to previous well-known catalogues, or else because a title may not always have seemed conveniently translatable. Indeed, whenever the French title is given in preference to the English one, there is always some reason for it. In the case of Unger's etchings, for instance, I have given the title in English when the catalogue of them was in English, and in French when the catalogue happened to be published in French. Sometimes I have given the title of an etching in French from simple



dislike to making a translation of my own which might not happen to be in the form familiar to English collectors. For example, there is the landscape by Rembrandt "Le Bouquet de Bois," a neat little French title, very well known. Of course one might translate it, but I really cannot tell by what exact title the plate is most familiarly known amongst English collectors. Most of the good catalogues have hitherto been in French, so that French titles have often a peculiar currency.

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