

Mr. White has kindly sent a few notes illustrating the works which he exhibited at Bridgwater.

### *Mr. White's Specimens of Engraving.*

The collecting of old engravings has been considered an elegant amusement ; to me it has been a labour of love and recreation. Since the introduction of photography, the engraver's art has

been much neglected, and we look in vain for works that match those beautiful old line-engravings of R. Morghen, Sir R. Strange, Wille, Woollett, and Sharpe; there is, however, a movement afloat to recover what has been lost in the art of etching, and we have some fine productions by Hammerton, Bodmin, Rajon, and others, and, we may hope that, the recent exhibition in London of the works of Rembrandt may stimulate the taste for these beautiful works.

It seems strange that *Rembrandt*, by himself, should be at this time so much sought after and extolled, for the style of his work is of a very peculiar character; his etchings are like his paintings, dark and heavy; in fact, he not only works for the same effects with the graver as with the brush, but he even carries this so far that he seems at times to try to make the graver convey those colours themselves which can only be given by the brush.

Now it has been said, with much truth, that "there are no Masters whose works, in the gross, deserve notice;" and again, that "no man is equal to himself in all his compositions." It appears, therefore, to me that an exhibition, not of all the works of one man, but of examples—good examples; if possible, the master-pieces of each eminent engraver—from the time of Albert Durer to Bartolozzi—would be *highly* instructive and interesting. It is on this principle that I have exhibited specimens from my collection of engravings, and I hope they may be of some interest to the learned Members of this Society. Following out my plan, I venture to offer you a few remarks on the pictures themselves, and on the artists who have executed them; so that, in however small a way, I may show how the art has flourished, and through what phases and hands it has passed.

*Albert Durer* was born at Nuremberg the 20th May, 1441, and although not the inventor, was one of the first improvers of the art of engraving, indeed two inventions are attributed to him, that of printing woodcuts in two colours, and that of etching. He was a man whose universality of talent extended

to every department of art, and carried all to a degree of perfection previously unknown in Germany; he was a man of letters and a philosopher, a man of business also, and for many years the leading magistrate of Nuremburg. His prints, considered as the first efforts of a new art, have great merit; indeed, it is astonishing to see a new art in its first essay carried to such a height. In some of those prints which he executed on copper the engraving is elegant to a great degree. The examples Nos. 1 and 2 of "St. Jerome in his Study," and "Holy Women at the Foot of the Cross," are marvellous productions for the time—1508 and 1514; the labour he has bestowed upon them has its full effect, and every part is well executed. His wood engravings, too, are wonderful works, though quaint; Nos. 4 and 5, taken from an old German Bible, are interesting. It is related that some were copied by Marc Antonio, who placed Durer's monogram on his works. Durer was much incensed at the forgery, and cited Antonio before the authorities, who restrained him from this practice for the future. "The Life of the Virgin," Nos. 6, 7, 8, are examples of these forgeries. There is also a fine, and rare, engraving by M. Antonio, No. 9, "The Descent from the Cross." The immediate successors and imitators of Albert Durer were Lucas Van Leyden (this extraordinary artist is regarded as the Patriarch of the Dutch School), and Aldegrever, b. 1502. "The labours of Hercules" are examples much in Durer's style.

*Henry Goltzius*, b. 1558, flourished a little after the death of these masters, and carried engraving to a great height. He was a native of Germany, where he learned his art, but travelling afterwards into Italy he there improved his ideas. No. 14, "The Boy and Dog" (the boy is supposed to be the portrait of Theodore Frisius, a painter of Venice, to whom he dedicated the print,) is considered one of his finest plates.

*John Muller*, b. 1570, engraved very much in the style of Goltzius, and yet in a still bolder and firmer manner. The "Adoration of the Magi," No. 15, is considered a master-piece by him.

*Count Goudt*, b. 1585, was a young nobleman who contracted a friendship in Rome with Adam Elshamer, from whose designs he engraved a few prints; he never practised engraving as a profession. This would call for indulgence if his prints had less merit; but in their way they are beautiful, though on the whole formal and unpleasant; they are highly finished, but void of all freedom. Moon-lights and torch-lights are the subjects he chiefly chooses, and his excellence lies in preserving the effects of the different lights. "Ceres drinking from a Pitcher" (called "The Sorcery"), is an example. There is a powerful effect of light in this engraving.

*Salvator Rosa*—b. at Naples, 1615; d. 1673, at Rome; (No. 18)—was bred a painter, and perfectly understood his art. We are told he spent the early part of his life with a troop of banditti, and that the rocky and desolate scenes, in which he was accustomed to take refuge, furnished him with those romantic ideas of landscape of which he is so exceedingly fond, and in the description of which he so greatly excels. His "Robbers," as his detached figures are commonly called, are supposed to have been taken from the life.

*Rembrandt's* excellence as a painter lay in colouring, which he possessed in such perfection that it almost screens every fault in his pictures. His execution is peculiar to himself; it is rough or neat, as he meant a sketch or a finished piece, but always free and masterly. It produces its effects by strokes intersected in every direction, and comes nearer the idea of painting than the execution of any other master; he is a strong contrast to *Salvator*. The one drew all his ideas from Nature, as she appears with the utmost grace and elegance; the other caught her in her meanest images, and transferred those images into the highest characters—hence, *Salvator* exalts banditti into heroes, *Rembrandt* degrades patriarchs into beggars. Nos. 19 to 25 are examples. "Count Guilderstein and his Son," and "The Three Trees," 1642, are considered very fine.

*Castiglione*—b. 1616, d. 1670—was an Italian painter of some

eminence ; he drew human figures with grace and correctness, yet he generally chose such subjects as would admit the introduction of animal life, and this often makes the more excellent part of his piece. There is a simplicity in the designs of this master which is very beautiful. In composition he excels greatly. He has left us several of his own etchings which are very valuable. In No. 26, "The Entering of Noah into the Ark," the composition, the distribution of light, the spirit and expression with which the animals are touched, and the freedom of the execution, are all admirable. There are also some heads—Nos. 27, 28, 29—which are very beautiful.

*Mellan*—b. 1601, d. 1688—was a whimsical engraver. He shadowed entirely with parallel lines, which he winds round the muscles of his figures, and he folds his draperies with great variety and beauty. No. 30 and 31 are examples of this peculiar style of work.

*Ostade's*—b. 1610, d. 1685—etchings are admirable representations of low life ; Nos. 32 and 33. They abound in humour and expression.

*Paul Potter*—b. 1625—etched several plates of cows and horses in a masterly manner. Two or three examples are exhibited.

*Waterloo*—b. 1618—is a name beyond any other in landscape, his subjects are perfectly rural ; simplicity is their characteristic. He selects a few striking objects—a coppice, a corner of a forest, a winding road, or a straggling village, is generally the extent of his view. His composition is good, his light well distributed. His chief merit lies in execution, in which he is a consummate master. Every object that he touches has the character of nature, but he particularly excels in the foliage of trees.

*Hollar's*—b. 1607, d. 1677—views of particular places are copied with great truth. His cathedrals, and a copy of Durer's head of Christ, are finely executed.

*S. Gräbelin*—b. 1661, came to England 1680—was a careful and laborious engraver. The Banqueting-House ceiling at

Whitehall, painted by Rubens, and "The Apotheosis of James 1st," are fine examples.

We now come to our celebrated countryman, *Hogarth*—b. 1698, d. 1764. The works of this master abound in true humour and satire, which are generally well directed. They are admirable moral lessons, and a fund of entertainment fitted to every taste, a circumstance which shows them to be just copies of nature. We may consider them, too, as valuable repositories of the manners, customs, and dresses of the age.

Some years ago, at the annual banquet of the Royal Academy, Lord Beaconsfield (then Mr. Disraeli) thus eloquently sketched the position of the Art of Painting in England at the beginning of the last century :—"Much less than two centuries ago," said the gifted orator, "when England was one of the greatest powers of Europe, when it produced statesmen and orators like Somers and Bolingbroke, when Marlborough conquered in every field, when we had a poet singing to the nation who in his style has never been rivalled ; when the great masters of composition and prose were Addison and Dryden, England, if it wished to transmit a portrait of any of these heroes, was obliged to import a Frenchman or a Fleming." Had the eloquence of the speaker, in relation to this part of his discourse, extended beyond the foregoing limit, had Mr. Disraeli dwelt further upon the decadence of art at this particular period of our history, he might with truth have added, that toward the close of the eighteenth century England had drifted into the unenviable position of being utterly unrepresented, in any national sense, in the art schools of Europe. Not the smallest encouragement was shown to the rising community of English artists of that time, who laboured in the midst of influences so discouraging as to support the belief that, had they been men less endowed than they were with the courage and qualities essential to success, they must have succumbed beneath the weight of contempt into which their art had fallen. Painters by possession of a distinctive genius, rather than from any special influence of

art education—persevering, studious, and energetic—strove manfully to one great end—the securing for painting that prominence and distinction among the arts which, happily, it now commands, not only in England itself, but throughout the world of civilization. If we search the records of the reign of George the Second, trusting to find there some gleam of encouragement afforded to artists, or example of patronage extended to their order, we encounter nothing but disappointment. The Monarch, “a dull little man,” we have been told, “of low tastes,” himself took no interest in art and the Court, and the wealthy of the nation generally followed the King’s example. “Pray who is this Hogarth?” inquired the King of his Secretary, when that functionary was seeking, on behalf of the artist, permission for the dedication to the sovereign of the celebrated engraving of the “March of the Guards to Finchley,” “Pray who is this Hogarth?” “A painter, my liege,” replied the Secretary. “*I hate painting and poetry both!*” promptly rejoined the sovereign; “neither the one nor the other ever did any good. Does the fellow intend to laugh at my Guards?” On its being explained to the King that there was certainly something savouring of burlesque discernable in the picture—“What,” exclaimed he, “a Painter burlesque a Soldier! The fellow deserves to be picketed for his insolence. Take the trumpery out of my sight.” This amusing, if not altogether well chosen or edifying anecdote, serves to illustrate the position of art in this country at the time when George the Second occupied the throne.

*Hogarth* was the creator of the present British school of painting. Art was at its lowest ebb in this country, when he led the way back to Nature—a marvellous inventor, a consummate physiognomist, and an admirable artist throughout. He overthrew long-time tradition, and, refusing to be bound by the conventionalism which had already enwrapped and threatened to smother the art-genius of England, boldly struck out a path for himself. In that path he laboured unceasingly, producing

from time to time splendid evidence of his masterly skill and inventive power, and discovering the way to that fertile ground, in which the most vital and vigorous spirit of English art has since manifested itself, that of domestic incident and dramatic story.

The author of the "Analysis of Beauty" was much ridiculed in his day. Nos. 65 to 73 are scarce *Anti-Hogarth* etchings, in which among other things he is represented as demonstrating that crookedness is the line of beauty.

*John Boydell*, b. 1719, d. 1804.—This excellent citizen, by prudent conduct and unceasing application, accumulated property which enabled him to form and to execute plans for the advancement of art and the encouragement of artists before unknown in this and in almost every other country. At the time he commenced publishing prints, the art of engraving was in a very low state in England. Little was sought for but French prints, and large remittances went annually to purchase them. Mr. Boydell, moved less by hope of gain than by patriotic feelings, resolved, if possible, to turn the tide in favour of his native country. He knew this could only be done by improving the practice of our professors in that department. For this purpose he used all the money he acquired in employing our most ingenious engravers to execute prints from pictures painted by eminent masters, by which means he called forth all their powers. English prints became popular not only in England, but throughout the Continent; and while the works of Woollett, Sharp, and others, were seen as the favourite ornaments of houses in Britain, they were sought for in France with almost equal avidity. In 1745 or 1746 he published six small landscapes designed and engraved by himself. He proceeded with unabating industry to engrave and publish till he had completed 152 prints, which he collected in one volume and published at five guineas, with the profits of this volume he was enabled to pay the best artists of his time, and thus presented the world with English engravings from the works of



the greatest masters. He used to observe that the book we have alluded to was the first that ever made a Lord Mayor of London.

That the art of engraving in Mezzotint should have attained its highest state of perfection whilst Sir Joshua Reynolds lived and painted, was a most happy coincidence ; it would seem as if the artist-engravers, contemporaries of Sir Joshua Reynolds, stimulated by the extraordinary power of the painter's brush, had been enabled to surpass their art for the purpose of faithfully transcribing, in all their entirety, the pictures they imitated ; as if the very genius of Reynolds had guided their hands, for the works of art of these engravers are as much masterpieces in their way as those of the great artist himself, and have contributed in no small degree to spread and perpetuate his reputation. Thus they delineated with wonderful truth and reality not only the expression and the grace, but even the characteristic peculiarities of the master's touch, rendering their works eminently pleasing and attractive ; the effect more resembles painting in Mezzotint than engraving, for with what subtle power are reproduced the lines, the forms, and the texture of each part of the picture, and yet how bold and forcible is the whole ! Such works as these delight us for their extreme beauty, and astonish us by their wonderful exactness to the original paintings, and we may well understand Sir J. Reynolds exclaiming, when he saw a fine engraving after one of his pictures by J. Mc. Ardell, "By this man I shall be immortalized." To possess such works, is to live with Reynolds, and in his times ; to study them is to nourish and improve the taste, while at the same time we are led to regret that this art, as then practised, should have passed away with the men who brought it to such perfection. There is a great and increasing interest in these fine Mezzotint engravings, and the extreme beauty and rarity of many of the plates is shown by a proof of the engraving of the Duchess of Rutland and one of Lady Bamfylde and Mrs. Pelham selling some time since for the large sum of 480 guineas.

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