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Proofs and Prints,

ENGRAVINGS AND ETCHINGS;

HOW THEY ARE MADE, THEIR GRADES, QUALITIES AND
VALUES, AND HOW TO SELECT THEM.

BY

C. KLACKNER.

NEW YORK :

1884.



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"WILL THEY CONSENT?"
(From an etching by Hamilton Hamilton.)

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PREFACE.

The growing taste for fine proof engravings and etchings in this country has given rise to a peculiar interest and inquiry into the material features of this line of art. Many, even among the most enthusiastic collectors, admit their lack of practical knowledge, and the demand upon print publishers and the newspapers for information is constant and extensive. In view of this fact, the author gives out this little volume, not as an essay on the art, but as a handy guide to those whose taste or inclination lead them to invest in its products. Its briefly stated facts furnish the information essential to an intelligent investment in engravings or etchings, and will, it is trusted, be found of interest as well as use to every reader. The author has not attempted an elaborate or exhaustive treatment of the subject, but a simple statement of the facts essential to a safe purchase of the works of art with which "Proofs and Prints" deals.

C. K.

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LINE ENGRAVING.



I.

ENGRAVING.

The processes of engraving are so numerous that it would be impossible to enter into a detailed description of them in any space less than a volume. Engraving in line, however, is that which occupies, and justly, the highest favor, and its method may be summarized as follows :

The line engraving is produced by incising the design upon a steel or copper plate with the dry point and burin, or by combining the work of these tools with that of acid. As a rule the first work of the engraver is to draw his design in broad masses upon the plate and etch or bite it in, finishing the work with the graver. The process of etching will be described in its place. The working up of an engraving after it has been etched is the test of the engraver's art. It is here that his delicacy of touch and his firmness of hand, his correct eye and his mechanical skill come into play. In the perfect engraving the line made by free hand must be as clean and unwavering as that traced by a machine.

The only machinery used in line engraving is the ingenious mechanism by which the parallel lines in skies and backgrounds are produced. The ruler operates with remarkable accuracy, producing the finest gradations of tint. But the delicate modulations of form and flesh and the artistic representations of texture can only be produced by the sentient machinery of hand and brain.

The tools of the engraver are the burin, a triangular rod of tempered steel ground to a point, used for producing the strong lines, and the dry point, which is a tempered steel needle firmly fixed in a handle, for the more delicate work.

Copper is rarely used in line engraving now, as the metal is too soft to last long under the press. Steel plates, whose surfaces are perfectly polished and free from inequalities or scratches, are the pages on which the engraver designs with indelible characters.

Line engraving has justly been called the perfection of the engraver's art. It brings into play all of his executive genius and his artistic feeling, and the perfect line engraving is and ever will be the purest example of the alliance of artistic with mechanical skill.

II.

PRINTING.

The printing of a line engraving is an operation of the highest importance. According as a plate is well or badly printed the value of the engraving is brought out or lost. The operation of printing is in itself simple enough. It is the intelligence with which it must be performed which renders it one of the skilled trades.

The plate to be printed is heated to a moderate temperature on a stone slab under which a flame of gas is kept burning. This is necessary to permit the ink to flow and enter the depths of the lines. The ink is thick and oleaginous, and is daubed over the plate until the lines are all filled. The surface of the plate is then wiped with a cloth and polished with the palm of the printer's hand. This cleans the surface perfectly, without disturbing the ink in the lines. A poor printer will, however, rub the ink in the delicate lines out, too, and produce a broken or rotten impression, giving only the coarse work, and thus destroying all the harmony and gradation of the engraving.

The plate, still warm, is placed upon a press; the paper, which is damp, is laid upon it, and it is rolled under a roller padded out with blankets, whose pressure forces the paper into the lines till it takes up the ink which fills them. A tremendous power is required for this, and the variation of a spider's web in the regulation of the pressure will render the impression defective. If a plate is allowed to cool before it is put under the press the ink also will harden in the lines and the paper will not take it up. The dampening of the paper is necessary to keep it from adhering to the plate.

The paper used in ordinary plate-printing is a fine, white paper, manufactured especially for the purpose. It varies in thickness according to the size of the plate. Proofs are printed on India paper, for which no substitute for the finest printing has yet been discovered. India paper is a production of the East, as its name implies. Its substance is vegetable fibre and it possesses an amazing tenacity, delicate richness of color and beauty of surface. India paper of the best quality is difficult to procure and very costly.

In taking India proofs, the India paper, cut to the proper proportion, is carefully laid upon the plate, a sheet of ordinary plate paper is laid over it and it is run through the press. The glutinous quality of the India paper and the pressure cause it to adhere to the plate paper and it comes out mounted and ready for use. Remark and Artist proofs require so much care in printing that only a few impressions can be made in a day, but all grades of plate impressions are the product of time and care, which increases in proportion to the quality required.

III.

REMARK PROOFS.

There are several grades of proofs, each of which has a special name and value. The Remark (from the French "Remarque") proof is the choicest and most valuable. The Remark is a special sketch or emblem engraved, at the engraver's fancy, upon the margin of the plate, as thus :



Remarks are not always attached to engravings; usually only to the most costly and important plates. There are at times as many as 100 impressions taken of the Remark plate, but 50 is the customary limit. The Remark proofs are the first impressions taken. They are printed with the utmost

care, and develop all the value of the engraving, every copy which exhibits an imperfection, even in a line, being destroyed.

 IV.

ARTIST'S PROOFS.

After the Remark proofs are made, the Remark is polished off of the plate and the Artist's proofs are taken. These usually number 200. Like the Remark proofs, they are executed with the most painstaking care; but they, of course, lack the value of the mark which stamps the first impressions of an engraving as cherished rarities. The Artist's proof is distinguished by the name of the painter and the engraver or etcher, as thus :

J. S. Brown.

James Scott.

When the name of either the one or the other is omitted, as may be in case of the death of artist or engraver, the value of the proof is not impaired. Any signed proof, with one or two names, is an Artist's proof. If no Remark proofs exist they are the first impressions taken, otherwise the second.

 V.

PROOFS BEFORE LETTERS.

The proofs before letters are printed immediately after the Artist's proofs. They usually consist of 100 copies. They are never signed by artist or engraver, but have their names engraved on the right and left hand corners of the plate respectively, in small letters. They also have the publisher's mark and address on the bottom, in this way:

T. W. Wood, pinxit.

C. Klackner, pub.

F. Girsch, eng.

 VI.

INDIA PRINTS.

India prints are the most desirable, after the Artist's proofs and proofs before letters. They have the title engraved upon them as well as the artist's and engraver's names and the publisher's marks. The edition is not limited in number. Their superiority to ordinary prints is due to the superior

quality of the impression produced by the India paper, while they lack the choiceness and consequent rarity of the preceding grades.

VII.

PLAIN PRINTS.

Plain prints are impressions on linen paper. They have all the marks and letters of India prints, and are printed with equal care. The paper, however, renders them of less value than the India impressions, because the quality of the latter paper enhances the beauty while it increases the cost of the proof.

VIII.

THE VALUE OF PROOFS.

▷ The value of a proof is regulated by the cost of engraving a plate and by the number of proofs issued. It can be readily understood that engravings from a plate which cost \$5,000, and of which only 100 proofs were taken, cannot be sold at the price of a plate which cost \$2,500. If the edition from the \$5,000 plate is unlimited, however, while that of the \$2,500 is restricted to 100, the latter may be more valuable, not because of its quality, but its rarity. Quality and quantity thus go hand in hand and are dependent upon one another.

The size of a plate has little to do in regulating the price of proofs. An engraver may, as in the case of the "Madonna di San Sisto," on which Mandel worked more than ten years, devote a good part of a lifetime to a plate, while one four times the size may be completed in a year. The quality of a plate, which is dependent on the time devoted to it, is the first test of its value.

To insure choice impressions it is always desirable to obtain the first grade, be it Remark or Artist's proof. The rapid sale of Artist proofs in this country and Europe exhausts the limited number printed in a very short time. The entire edition is frequently sold immediately after publication. Publishers in most cases reserve the right to advance the price, so that in numerous instances early purchasers can obtain a handsome advance on the first cost very shortly after purchasing. "L'Angelus," by Millet, published at \$187, has advanced to \$350, and

is difficult to purchase at that price; "The Jersey," painted by Douglas, and published at \$30, has risen as high as \$175; Artist proofs of the engraving of "Far Away," after J. G. Brown, by F. Girsch, recently published at \$30, has already risen to \$65; "Inspiration," by S. J. Ferris, has reached \$75 from \$30, and "The Vesper Hour," a fine etching by King, scarcely three months old, has advanced from \$30 to \$45. Another example is in the beautiful etchings by A. F. Bellows, "The Inlet" and "The Millstream," which were published at \$18 and now bring \$45.

Such examples could be multiplied to apply to hundreds of engravings. They will, however, serve to show that while the best and most perfect impressions are the most expensive, they are worth their cost, for one may enjoy their use for years while they are all the time earning interest on themselves.

IX.

COPYRIGHTED PICTURES.

The popularity and value of original American engravings are to a great extent enhanced by the absence of an international copyright law. This leaves the finest foreign works open to cheap reproduction, which must to a certain extent impair the value of the legitimate impressions. An illustration is shown in the frequent and barefaced appropriation of the most costly foreign engravings for the commonest sorts of advertising here. The numerous mechanical processes of reproduction render this piracy the more easy and common.

American plates, protected by copyright, are, however, safe. Their value is certain to be preserved, if not to advance with time, secure from any of the aggressions to which every unprotected work is open.

ETCHINGS.

I.

ETCHING.

The art of etching is as distinct from that of engraving as its results are, though certain of the methods of engraving are employed. Its process may be briefly described as follows:

A polished copper plate is covered with a ground of varnish prepared for the purpose, and upon it the design is drawn, line for line, as it is intended to appear on paper, with a sharp needle, which scratches through the varnish to the plate and leaves the metal bare. It is exactly like making a pen drawing, save that a needle is employed instead of a pen. When the design is completed the surface of the plate is flooded with aquafortis. This attacks the spots laid bare by the needle, without penetrating where the varnish is untouched, and bites into the copper. When the finer lines are deep enough the acid is poured off, and they are covered or stopped out with varnish. The acid is applied again and again in this way, biting the lines to the depth required, the heaviest and strongest lines naturally receiving the most biting. The etcher's eye and his knowledge are his only guides in this process, and a miscalculation in the strength of the acid or the time it is permitted to remain on the plate often ruins a fine work.

After being bitten in, etchings usually receive some finish with the dry point. This is a needle which is used to scratch supplementary lines upon the plate, strengthening parts which are not bitten deep enough. Some etchings are made almost entirely with the dry point, like those of James Tissot. Their effect is wonderfully powerful and rich. In simple etching the effect is produced by a line in the plate, but in dry point it

comes not only from the line but from a ridge of metal, or bur as it is called, which is ploughed up by the needle and which catches the ink and gives a softness to the edge of the line.

The bur is produced in all engraving, whether on steel or copper, but in line engravings it is scraped and burnished away, as the chief beauty of a work of that sort is its cleanness of line. In the etching, on the contrary, where a general richness of effect is desired, it is often a powerful assistance to the artist.

II.

PRINTING ETCHINGS.

The printing of etchings is a fine art, where that of engraving is only a skilled labor. In an engraving all that is required is a clean line, so that that the engraver's work may show to full advantage. But a portion of the effect of an etching comes from the skill with which the plate is manipulated.

When the etcher completes his plate it is a drawing made with free lines, each of which will hold ink. But additional effects can be secured by leaving a film of ink over portions of the plate. Delicate shades of sky and water, and rich sweeps of shadow, are thus produced. It is for this reason that many etchers print their own plates; others supervise the printing. Those who do not, furnish proofs with the effects they desire produced upon them, which the printer is obliged to copy.

The ink is dabbed on the plate with a cloth dabber. Then the printer wipes it, first with a tarletan and afterward with a fine rag, taking off all the ink where high lights are called for and leaving a thicker or thinner film where a shade is required. The ink itself plays an important part in the printing. The colors employed are usually brown or black, or a combination of the two, though etchings are sometimes printed in other tints.

The dry color is carefully ground up with linseed oil of double strength, till it is reduced to a smooth pulp. In the case of faintly bitten plates a thinner ink is used to bring out the lines than is necessary in stronger work. Etched plates are heated like engraved ones for inking and printing.

The etched plate is printed on a steel plate press, being passed under the roller on a horizontal table or slab. It is

covered with a couple of blankets, one of felt and the other of blanket stuff, the felt being next to the paper, as its fine texture furnishes an absolutely smooth surface to pressure. Etchings require careful drying after printing, for the deep lines produced by the acid and the heavy pressure of the press bring the ink out upon them in strong ridges, which are easily smeared until the ink is set.

III.

PAPER.

The paper used in printing etchings depends in a great measure on the character of the plate. The smooth white paper made for line engravings is never used, however. Whatman's drawing paper is a favorite. Whatman's vellum paper also brings out rich and heavy work with splendid effect, its exquisite surface giving an especial delicacy to the finer points of the plate. It is prepared by a long soaking in water to extract the size from it, and is then run through a press a number of times, before it is used, to render it perfectly smooth of surface.

Japanese paper is used to a great extent and produces excellent impressions. Its high reputation is due to a certain silkiness of texture and surface, which is produced by the cocoons of the silkworm, which are largely used in its manufacture.

Parchment is noted for the brilliant and strong impressions that it produces; vellum is a stronger material than parchment, more solid and not transparent; vellum is made of calfskin, while parchment is the finest of sheepskin, carefully cured, shaved down and freed from imperfections.

Satin proofs are a magnificent novelty in the printing of etchings. Satin possesses a delightful smoothness and brilliancy of surface, admirably calculated to bring out the contrast of light and shade of a bright plate. Where figures and drapery form a feature it is unapproachable, though, indeed, satin proofs of any subject rank among the especially valuable ones.

IV.

PAINTER ETCHINGS.

There are two classes of etchings in the trade—painter and reproductive etchings. The first named are the *original*

works of the artists, the last copies by artists or engravers from the works of others.

Painter etchings have the value of original works. They are esteemed as showing the methods and spirit of the artist, just as a sketch by him would. The fine etchings by A. F. Bellows are examples. Those who own an etching by this master really own an original drawing by him. The only difference is that it is drawn on metal instead of paper, and can be mechanically reproduced.

The etchings of such painters as Kruseman van Elten, Henry Farrer, Hamilton Hamilton, W. H. Shelton, J. Wells Champney, C. A. Platt, J. A. S. Monks and other well known artists have achieved a popularity with the public second only to that of their pictures themselves.

Good painter etchings always increase in value, in proportion to the reputation of the artist and the number printed. Large editions are, however, very rarely made.

W.

REPRODUCTIVE ETCHINGS.

Reproductive etchings are copies of pictures. Many artists of distinguished merit, who produce the finest original work, are also reproductive etchers. Witness, for instance, Walter Shirlaw, Stephen J. Ferris, Stephen Parrish, Hamilton Hamilton and others. Among the best of our distinctly reproductive etchers are James S. King, whose plate of "The Vesper Hour" is one of the most popular ever published here, and John T. Bentley, whose architectural plates are justly regarded as the most picturesque and masterly etchings of their character produced in the United States.

JUST PUBLISHED.

THE FOLLOWING ETCHINGS AND ENGRAVINGS.

"The Parting Day," (From Gray's 'Elegy,') G. D. CLEMENTS.
"The Vesper Hour," " "
"When We Were Boys," B. LANDER.
"Saturday Afternoon," " "
"A New England Harbor," J. C. NICHOLL.
"Off the Battery," " "
"Will They Consent?" H. HAMILTON.
"Between Two Fires," W. T. SMEDLEY.
"The Dairymaid," J. M. TRACY.
"A Jersey," C. WIGGINS.
"Far From Home," J. G. BROWN.
"In an Old Pasture," J. A. S. MONKS.
"Return From Pasture," " "
"Mountain Top," " "
"At Dusk," " "
"Evening on the Delaware," J. H. MILLSPAUGH.
"Village Mills," " "
"Lake View," " "
"New York Bay," <i>Jersey Shore</i> , " "
"Solitude," " "
"The Inlet," A. F. BELLOWS.
"The Mill-stream," " "
"The Ferry," " "
"At Dawn," " "
"Peaceful Evening," " "
"Summer Evening," " "
"Venice," STEPHEN PARISH.
"Winter at Trenton," " "
"Watching and Waiting," JAS. S. KING.
"Far Away," and others.

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