

SCHILLER'S "BRAVE MAN," ILLUSTRATED BY RETSCH.

On a former occasion we presented to our readers eight illustrative designs by this celebrated German artist; engravings made doubly interesting by the genius of the designer and the fame of the poet whose composition they illustrated, namely, the "Pegasus in Harness," by Schiller. In those designs the peculiar characteristics of Retzsch were distinctly portrayed; that style and expression which can be taught in no school, but owe their birth to the genius of the man, were well depicted. While the general effect is good, while the grouping shows both taste and judgment, the careful minuteness with which every detail is managed shows us that the German master was diligent in every minor particular, in order that his work might bear a more elaborate criticism than that which would suggest itself on a first glance.

Retzsch possesses an almost intuitive perception of an author's meaning, and this renders his illustrations striking and peculiar, sometimes exaggerated and fantastic, often ineffably sublime. Here and there he even corporealises the metaphors of the poet, now by a drawing grotesque and vague, now by a literal interpretation. And he is neither a borrowing nor begging man, his work is original; whether he depicts the thoughts of others or his own, he goes about it in a way no other man would, never seems to seek for a precedent, or to design after this or that great man, but fairly sketches what he thinks; he has fashioned the picture in his mind's eye, it has grown up before him into shape and vigour as real as though the men, women, cattle, fields, and cities were actually before him. For while Retzsch is original, his is not that sort of originality which represents nothing truthfully; he is true in all that he does. He is thoroughly German, has much of the earnestness and depth of thought peculiar to his countrymen, is the best picture-maker for a German poet, and besides no mean poet himself, the picture-poet of Germany.

The designs which we now give are intended to illustrate Schiller's well-known poem, entitled "The Brave Man."

A river has overflowed its banks, the desolating water with huge masses of ice floating upon it has poured down on the devoted city, these ice fragments are striking together with fearful violence, the cry of alarm has been raised as the dark waters have come onward with irresistible power, deluging the fields and pasture lands, sweeping over the high roads, and in their wild fury bursting on the town, and in a few moments carrying away the arches of the bridge, the houses, and the walls. Towards the banks of the river there is nothing but desolation, and the citizens of the loftier localities look with affright on the raging water—old and young, rich and poor, are gathered; the governor with his slashed doublet and plumed bonnet is riding in their midst, the people flock around him, all suggesting remedies, for a portion of the bridge still remains separated entirely from the shore, the rushing water beating upon it with increased violence, but that one part of the bridge and one house upon it still is there, like a rock in the sea. There is within that dwelling an old man, his daughter, and entire family; they are exposed to almost certain death; they stretch forth their arms, crying for help to their fellow-citizens, crying for help to the heavens! The people regard them with stupor. Who is bold enough to front the danger? Who has courage enough to expose his life to save those unfortunates? Who among that crowd will do it? Again and again the question is put, but in vain; the hours pass on; the peril increases; the ice-blocks smite on the frail arch like battering-rams, and the stones tremble.

The governor offers a large reward; he holds the bag of gold in his hand; how anxiously all eyes are turned towards him; even the crippled beggar strives to get nearer, and his eyes grow bright at the chink of the guelders. The figure nearest to the magistrate is looking upward with a perplexed glance, as though counting the cost of the venture. Every face exhibits the same expression; what will cupidity not do? who can withstand the offered gold? who will

now volunteer to aid in the rescue? Duty and humanity have appealed in vain, let Mammon cry in the market!

Do you remark in the crowd that young man of a vigorous frame, and fine, sagacious, honest countenance; his shadowed profile only visible, but his athletic form indicating strength and energy? He presses through the crowd, and volunteers to go, and a great shout is raised for the hero. A boat is procured, he steps lightly in, and, with almost supernatural skill, guides his craft amongst the ice-blocks. This is the second picture.

The brave man is standing in the boat, his tall, well-proportioned frame in full exercise, his head towards the citizens he strives to save; his countenance is noble and expressive, the index of a noble heart. A wild scene of desolation surrounds him. To the right is the city, the steeple of the old church rising above the houses, but elsewhere nothing but the turbid waters, the masses of floating ice, with here and there the fragments of the wreck it has already made;—here the trunk of a tree—there the body of a dead bullock—and in the centre of the stream the remaining portion of the bridge fast giving way, the unhappy family gathered upon it, with arms outstretched for help. Help is at hand. Fearlessly the deliverer urges on the boat nearer and still nearer to the object that he seeks; his risk is imminent, but his brave heart never trembles.

The third picture shows us that the rescue has been effected. Amid the floating ice-blocks the brave man steers his boat, at the near end of which sits the old man, wan, pale, ghastly; his children are clinging to him with the tenacity of despair; the young hero is exerting himself to the utmost, and his figure is displayed to advantage by the position which he occupies;—the artist has thrown wonderful energy into this composition; the anatomy of the strong, muscular frame is boldly and accurately represented. The boat is nearing the shore, where the group of citizens may be noticed; the governor occupies the principal place, and the evident excitement of the crowd is well exhibited; most of them are pressing forward, while some have climbed the neighbouring walls, and are looking on the brave man's struggle. Already they hail him as a hero, a conqueror—and caps are waved, and shouts are raised, as the boat draws near.

The fourth picture concludes the story. The bark has touched the shore. The emotion of the citizens, their joy at the rescue, is evident enough; the family rescued from their perilous position form an interesting and touching group, as with clasped hands and on bended knees they pour forth their gratitude. The governor and the brave hero form the principal objects in the design; the first is stooping forward and offering the bag of gold to the young man, who is steadily refusing it; with significance he points to the rescued group, as if he said, "This is reward enough, I seek no other recompence, my guerdon is their happiness; what gold can be compared with that?" Skilfully the artist has represented the sunshine, bright and beautiful, falling on the group; elsewhere the clouds are dark and murky, but now the storm is over, and the beams of light fall cheerfully on the brave deliverer.

Maurice Retzsch was born at Dresden in 1779. His family came from Hungary, and had been driven from their old home to escape the persecution that raged there against the Protestants. Not till he was twenty years old did Retzsch apply himself to the study of painting; but he disliked all restraint and would have preferred following the bent of his genius as a hunter in the woods and as a student of nature in solitude. "He was, however, persuaded to enter the Academy at Dresden in 1798, and after submitting awhile to the irksome drudgery of copying, to acquire the mechanical part of painting, he began to exhibit his talent and genius as an original and poetic artist. The works of his illustrious countrymen Schiller and Goethe acted on his mind like inspiration, and with a kindred spirit he embodied their wild and wonderful descriptions in form and substance."



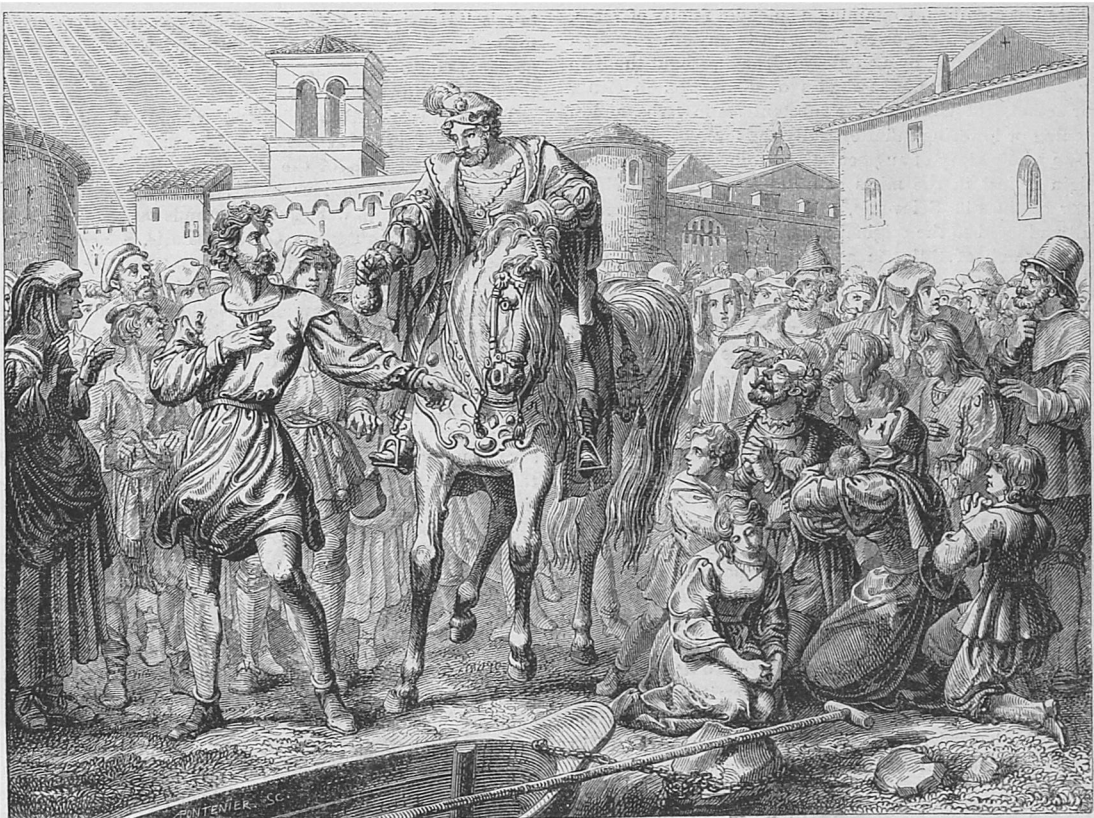
THE GOVERNOR OFFERING A REWARD FOR THE RESCUE OF THE FAMILY.—SCHILLER'S "BRAVE MAN."



THE BRAVE MAN GUIDING HIS BOAT TO THE RESCUE.—SCHILLER'S "BRAVE MAN."



THE RESCUED FAMILY NEARING THE SHORE.—SCHILLER'S "BRAVE MAN."



THE BRAVE MAN REFUSING THE OFFERED REWARD.—SCHILLER'S "BRAVE MAN."