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A Biographical Dictionary

Containing An Historical Account Of All The Engravers, From The Earliest Period Of The Art Of Engraving To The Present Time; And A Short List Of Their Most Esteemed Works. ... To Which Is Prefixed, an Essay On The Rise And Progress Of The Art Of Engraving, Both On Copper And On Wood. ...

Strutt, Joseph

London, 1785

Preface.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Art of Engraving was never more encouraged than in the present day, especially in England, where almost every man of taste is in some degree a collector of prints. It is therefore rather extraordinary, that a work of this kind, which I need not say is greatly wanted, should have been so long neglected; particularly when we recollect, that we have not any satisfactory account of the Engravers, or their works, in the English tongue.

In France the example has been set us by Bafan, who, with the assistance of the Notes of M. Mariette, has given us a regular account of upwards of a thousand artists. It is a very ingenious compilation, and, as far as it goes, exceedingly useful. The descriptions which he gives of the prints belonging to each artist are very accurate, and the observations which occur, are no small proofs of the solidity of his judgment; but he has generally omitted to inform us of the style or manner in which they worked: neither has he given us the marks or monograms, which they often substituted instead of their names; and these omissions render his work much less valuable than it would otherwise have been, because it affords us but little assistance in distinguishing the works of one master from those of another of the same name, or who might use the same mark.

The other foreign publications upon the subject, though very multifarious, are, nevertheless, exceedingly defective; few of them speak of the Art of Engraving abstractedly; and the greater part of them are little more than ~~unsatisfactory catalogues of the names~~ of the artists, or lists of their works, without any proper description. If Professor Christ had paid sufficient attention to this particular, his Dictionary of Monograms would have afforded infinitely more assistance in distinguishing the works of the old masters, the one from the other; though it is confessedly, as it stands, a very desirable performance. In English, we have Evelyn's *Sculptura*, a small book entitled *Sculptura*

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Historico-Technica, compiled originally by the elder Faithorne; and *The Series of Engravers*, published at Cambridge: These, excepting *Catalogues* of particular masters works, are all the books I can recollect of any consequence, in which the artists are generally spoken of (for *Virtue's Catalogue of the Engravers*, published by the Hon. Mr. Walpole, is confined to the English school only); and that they are very defective, a small degree of examination will abundantly prove. I need not say how expensive it would be to purchase all the publications, which bear any reference to the Art of Engraving; but I fear, the information to be gained, from the far greater part of them, would be neither adequate to the cost, nor the study which must necessarily be bestowed upon them.

In the prosecution of the present work, I have followed Mr. Pilkington's plan, and arranged the names of the artists alphabetically, (in the manner of a dictionary) rather than chronologically; because by this method they are much more easily referred to. But I thought it highly necessary to add, for the conveniency of the Reader, a Chronological Table of the same names, with a List of the Disciples of each Master; which will, of course, be placed at the end of the second volume.

Nearly three thousand names are included in the narrow limits of this work; the lives of the artists must, of course, be drawn up in as short a compass as possible. I am well aware of the dryness of a mere Dictionary History, as also of the frequent repetitions which must necessarily occur; and I have endeavoured to compensate for these defects, by a diligent attention to truth: at the same time, whenever I could meet with an interesting anecdote to enliven the performance, I have gladly inserted it. But so many of the engravers lived and died in obscurity, that little, very little matter of amusement, exclusive of the arts, can be gathered from the barren soil. These unfavourable circumstances will not, I hope, be placed to my account, even when it appears, that I have chosen rather to leave the subject naked as it is, than to adorn it in a more pleasing manner, at the expence of veracity.

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With respect to the general character of each artist, I have written as an Engraver, and endeavoured as clearly as possible, to point out the style in which he worked, and wherein his great excellence consisted; and upwards of twenty years experience, may, perhaps, plead a little in favour of my judgment. I have constantly, however, endeavoured to deliver my sentiments in the most impartial manner; and if I am in any instance thought to speak too highly in favour of the artist, I hope to claim some small share of indulgence, because I constantly speak as I feel, and never presume to give my opinion positively, without adding the reasons upon which it is grounded.

The prints contained in the several lists, are either such as are most generally esteemed, or such as best illustrate the criticisms I give of each master's works. I am too well convinced of the difficulty of deciding precisely upon the works of a great master; or saying positively which is his best print. I freely own, that looking over the battles of Alexander, engraved by Girard Audran from Le Brun, I have constantly considered that as best, which I last examined. Finding it so very hard a task to form a decisive opinion in my own mind, I could not reasonably presume to dictate to others; especially as I am certain that this book must fall into the hands of many, whose judgment is greatly superior to my own.

The work is preceded by an introductory Essay on the Origin and Progress of the Art of Engraving, with copies from the works of the oldest and scarcest masters; and at the end of each volume are given two tables, the first containing the initial letters used by the artists mentioned in it; and the other, an explanation of the monograms, cyphers, and other marks, with which they occasionally distinguished their engravings.

The Reader, by barely looking over the outlines of this work, will readily conceive the great labour and difficulty which must attend the prosecution of it, and on this account, I hope for indulgence. Many errors must necessarily have escaped my notice, not a few of them arising from the obscurity of a great number of the artists, and the
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confusion their works are subject to, from the want of proper distinction; several of them using precisely the same mark, and copying from each others engravings. Many omissions doubtless will be found; but to compensate in some measure for them, it must be remembered, that I have made an addition of nearly two thousand names, to the Catalogue of Bafan; and, I hope, at least, that the name of no artist of any great consequence will be found wanting in the work. To the candour of the Public I now submit it, and doubt not but that the judgment I shall receive, will be given without partiality.

CHARLTON STREET,

AUGUST 1, 1785.