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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. ...

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Chapter I. The Excellency of the Art of Engraving; the Qualifications requisite for an Engraver; the different Modes of Engraving; and some Observations concerning the Criticisms upon Prints.

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AN
E S S A Y
ON THE
ART OF ENGRAVING,
WITH A FULL ACCOUNT
OF ITS
ORIGIN AND PROGRESS.

CHAPTER I.

The Excellency of the Art of Engraving; the Qualifications requisite for an Engraver; the different Modes of Engraving; and some Observations concerning the Criticisms upon Prints.

SECT. I. **T**HE improvement of the Arts has ever been considered as an object of great importance, by the enlightened part of mankind; and there is no nation in the world, where the art of engraving is held in higher esteem, or more generously encouraged, than in England. Hence it is, that Great Britain, at this time, abounds with artists, equal in number, and superior in abilities, to those of any other country. A view then of the rise and progress of an art, of such national consequence, naturally becomes interesting, not only to the engravers themselves, but to all who profess the love of it. And if England can lay no claim to the invention of engraving, we shall prove at least hereafter, that her pretensions to the early exercise of it are as justly founded, as those of the Italians or the Germans.

With respect to the use and excellency of the art of engraving, I beg leave to subjoin the following observations. They were drawn up by a gentleman of great taste, and are the result of a critical examination of the works of the greatest masters; and will, I trust, be still more acceptable to the public, as they are not the remarks of an engraver, but of a gentleman; no otherways interested in the cause, than as a man of science, and a lover of the arts.

“Of all the imitative arts, painting itself not excepted, engraving is the most applicable to general use, and the most resorted to from the necessities of mankind. From its earliest infancy, it has been called in, as an assistant in almost every branch of knowledge; and has, in a very high degree, facilitated the means of communicating our ideas, by representing to the sight whatever is capable of visible imitation; and thereby preventing that circumlocution, which would ill explain, in the end, what is immediately conceived from the actual representation of the object.”

“From the facility of being multiplied, prints have derived an advantage over paintings, by no means inconsiderable. They are found to be more durable; which may,
VOL. I. B “however,



“ however, in some degree, be attributed to the different methods in which they are preserved. Many of the best paintings of the early masters have generally had the misfortune to be either painted on walls, or deposited in large and unfrequented, and consequently damp and destructive buildings; whilst a print, passing, at distant intervals, from the *porte feuille* of one collector to that of another, is preserved without any great exertion of its owner: And hence it happens, that whilst the pictures of Raphael have mouldered from their walls, or deserted their canvases, the prints of his friend and contemporary, Mark Antonio Raimondi, continue in full perfection to this day, and give us a lively idea of the beauties of those paintings, which, without their assistance, had been lost to us for ever; or, at least, could have been only known to us, like those of Zeuxis and Apelles, by the descriptions which former writers on these subjects have left us.

“ Perhaps there are no representations, which interest so strongly the curiosity of mankind as portraits. A high degree of pleasure, of which almost every person is susceptible, is experienced from contemplating the looks and countenances of those men, who, by their genius or their virtues, have entitled themselves to the admiration and esteem of future ages. It is only in consequence of the facility, with which prints are multiplied from the same engraving, that this laudable appetite is so frequently gratified. Whilst the original portrait is limited to the wall of a private chamber, or adorns some distant part of the world, a correct transcript of it, exhibiting the same features, and the same character, gives to the public at large the full representation of the object of their veneration or esteem.

“ In this country, where the genuine paintings of the ancient masters are extremely scarce, we are much indebted to prints for the truth of our ideas, respecting the merits of such masters. And this is no bad criterion, especially when the painter, as is frequently the case, has left engravings or etchings of his own. With respect to the principal excellencies of a picture, a print is equally estimable with a painting. We have there every perfection of design, composition, and drawing; and the outline is marked with a degree of precision, which frequently excels the picture; so that where the merit of the master consists more particularly in the knowledge of these primary branches of the art, his prints may be better than his paintings; as was notoriously the case with Peter Testa, who, possessed of every excellence of a painter, except a knowledge in the art of colouring, acquired that reputation by his etchings, which his paintings never could have procured him.

“ A knowledge of the style and manner of the different masters is only to be obtained by a frequent inspection, and comparison of their works. If we were to judge of Raphael himself from some of his pictures, we should be disposed to refuse our assent to that praise, which he has now for so many centuries enjoyed. Every master has at times painted below his usual standard, and consequently is not to be judged of by a single picture; and where is the collection, that affords sufficient specimens of any of the elder masters, to enable a person to become a complete judge of their merits?---Can we from a few pictures form an adequate idea of the invention and imagination of a painter,---of the inexhaustible variety of form and feature, which is the true characteristic of superior excellence? But let us look into a collection of prints after any eminent artist, engraved either by himself or others, and we shall then have an opportunity of judging of his merits, in the first and indispensable qualifications of a painter. If we find grandeur of design, united with elegant composition and accurate drawing, we have the strongest testimonies of superior abilities; and from a general comparison and accurate observation of a number of such prints, we may venture to form to ourselves a decisive opinion, respecting the merit of such masters. On examining the prints after Raphael, we find, that his first manner was harsh, and Gothic; in short, a transcript of his master Perugino; but that from some fortunate circumstance, he afterwards adopted that sublime and graceful manner, which he ever retained.

“ Wherever a painter has himself handled the graver, his prints are most generally impressed with the same character as his paintings; and are therefore likely to give us a very accurate idea of his style. The prints of Albert Durer, Rembrandt, and Salvator

vator

“vator Rosa, are all such exact counterparts of their paintings, that at this time, when the
 “colouring of their pictures is often so far changed, as to answer little farther purpose,
 “than that of light and shadow, they become in a manner their rivals; and, in the gene-
 “ral acceptation of the world, the prints of some of these artists have been as highly
 “valued, as their paintings.

“Independent of the advantages which prints afford us, when considered as accurate re-
 “presentations of paintings, and imitations of superior productions, they are no less valuable
 “for their positive merit, as immediate representations of nature. For it must be
 “recollected, that the art of engraving has not always been confined to the copying other
 “productions, but has frequently itself aspired to originality, and has, in this light, pro-
 “duced more instances of its excellence, than in the other. Albert Durer, Goltzius,
 “and Rembrandt, amongst the Dutch and Germans; Parmigiano and Della Bella,
 “amongst the Italians, and Callot amongst the French, have published many prints,
 “the subjects of which, there is great reason to suppose, were never painted. These
 “prints may therefore be considered as original pictures of those masters, deficient only in
 “those particulars, in which a print must necessarily be inferior to a painting.

“The preceding distinction may perhaps throw some light on the proper method of
 “arranging and classing a collection of prints, which has been a matter of no small dif-
 “ficulty. As an art imitating another, the principal should take the lead, and the design,
 “composition, and drawing in a print, being previous requisites to the manner of execu-
 “tion, and finishing; prints engraved after paintings should be arranged under the name
 “of the painter: and every person, who looks upon engraving only as auxiliary to
 “painting, will consequently adopt this mode of arrangement. But when engraving is
 “considered as an original art, as imitating nature without the intervention of other
 “methods, then it will certainly be proper to regulate the arrangement, according to the
 “names of the engravers.

“The invention of printing, in the fifteenth century, was undoubtedly the greatest
 “acquisition, which mankind ever made towards the advancement of general science.
 “Before that event, the accumulated wisdom of ages was confined to the leaves of a
 “few mouldering manuscripts, too expensive to be generally obtained, and too highly
 “valued to be often trusted out of the hands of the owner. History affords us many
 “instances of the difficulty, with which even the loan of a book was procured, and of sure-
 “ties being required to be answerable for its return; but the discovery of printing broke
 “down the barriers, which had so long obstructed the diffusion of learning; and the rapid
 “progress in civilization, which immediately took place, is itself the happiest testimony
 “of the great utility of the invention. What printing has been, with respect to general
 “science, engraving has been to the arts; and the works of the old Italian masters will
 “be indebted to engraving for that perpetuity, which the invention of printing has
 “secured to the Jerusalem of Tasso, and the tragedies of Shakespeare and Corneille.”

SECT. II. Of all the species of engraving, that of historical subjects is the
 most noble, and requires the greatest exertions of genius and application to bring it
 to perfection. But before I enter into an enquiry concerning the necessary qualifications
 to form a good historical engraver, I wish to make, what appears to me very necessary,
 a proper distinction between taste and judgment, abstractedly considered, as relative to the
 arts, particularly the executive part of them.

Judgment I conceive to be the result of a uniform habit of thinking, founded upon some
 given principle, received into the mind, as the standard of excellence, from which a
 comparison is formed, and things are admitted as perfect or imperfect, in proportion as
 they approach to or recede from those ideas of beauty, by which the mind is prepossessed.
 Hence it appears, that a man of judgment only will be a mannerist, in a greater or less
 degree; and this proportion must also depend upon the number of the objects the artist
 unites together, upon which he forms those decided ideas in his mind. If the object be
 single, of course his ideas will be unvaried; and the same style of execution will appear
 continually, and cannot fail of disgusting at last, though excellent in itself to a superior
 degree.



This habit of thinking, and expressing the thoughts, may be acquired by practice, whether it relates to the speculative notion of prints, or the manual execution of them.

Taste, I should wish to define, as the effect of a natural genius, or propensity in the mind, by which it is led to assimilate to itself a diversity of such forms as are generally allowed to be beautiful, and place them in such points of view, as shall render them agreeable to the eye. And this propensity must exist in the mind, previous to the application of the foreign aids of instruction and study, which, though they may, and certainly do, cultivate and improve the genius, can never bestow it. A blind man might as soon reason concerning the beauty of colours, and a deaf man upon the harmony of sounds, as a superior artist be produced by dint of study only. A neat, stiff, laboured engraving he might accomplish; but a spirited, free, and unaffected performance, is far beyond the reach of simple industry. It is the union of genius and judgment, which completes the artist; and without them both he can never be superlatively great.

On this account, we frequently see a man possessed of great judgment in drawing, and every other requisite for the execution of a plate, excepting taste, produce a cold, formal work; and though we cannot help perhaps admiring the patience of the artist, and the precision, with which he has finished the engraving; yet this admiration is mixed with a sort of pity for him. We conceive a painful idea of drudgery, which still increases, in proportion as we examine the performance; and we are obliged to confess, that it is no more equal to the animated works of genius, than the motionless statue of the animal, to the living animal itself.---To be convinced of this, let us compare the works of Jerom Wierix, or any of the precise German masters, with those of Henry Goltzius, or Gerard Audran. Upon the same principle it is, that all the learning in the world, exclusive of an animated conception, could never make a Shakespeare or a Milton.

These observations naturally lead me to others equally important, by which I mean to prove a manifest difference between neatness and high finishing, which are too frequently confounded. The first of these consists in the precision and exactness of the mechanical execution of a plate; the second, in the harmony and powerfulness of the effect, and a judicious distribution of the light and shadow. It is true, some proportion of neatness is also requisite, in order to produce a highly finished effect; but a print, on the other hand, may be extremely neat, and yet, when held at a distance, have all the appearance of a slight sketch. To elucidate these observations, I must again have recourse to the old engravers, and more particularly Jerom Wierix and his followers with respect to neatness; and the Sadelers, Cornelius Cort, and Villamena, nay, we may add Henry Goltzius himself: in all the works of these artists, though executed in a masterly manner, we find the lights left clear and broad, not in masses, but frequent spots, equally powerful upon the distances, as upon the principal objects, which confuses the subject, and fatigues the eye. These, when compared with the more modern engravings of Drevet and Edelinck in France, and of Woollett, with other great artists in our own country, (where the management of the *clair-obscur* has certainly been carried to a very superior pitch of excellence) will sufficiently manifest the difference.

From nature an historical engraver should possess strong mental faculties, a lively genius, and a just eye for proportion. To these he must add great application; the most excellent models of the art he ought constantly to have before him; and, above all things, he should acquire a thorough grounded knowledge of the human figure. Harmony of effect, and the management of the *clair-obscur*, are also to be considered as absolutely necessary. And having acquired a facility of managing the point, or graver, or rather of both, let him always bear in memory, that however he may suppose himself arrived at a superior degree of excellence, it will be greatly to his discredit, as an engraver, if he forgets to pay that attention to the picture he copies, which is due to its author; and, instead of giving us the style of the painter, exhibits one of his own. For though he should justly avoid the servile manner of a Chateau, he certainly ought not, on the other hand, to take the unwarrantable liberty of a Dorigny, who, engraving from Raphael, forgot the master, and transmitted to us his own mannered designs, under the sanction of that celebrated name. I need not, I hope, apologize for adding, that I con-



sider Gerard Audran, without exception, as the greatest historical engraver that ever existed; and I think his works will abundantly prove, that he possessed, in a superior degree, every one of those requisites, which I have mentioned, in the character of an engraver, as drawn above.

The illiberal reflections, which, by ignorant pretenders to the art, have been cast upon the engravers, hardly merit an answer, and particularly, when not mentioned under proper restrictions; namely, that they deserve not the name of artists, but are to be considered as mere copyists. Now, not to mention the works of Albert Durer, Lucas Van Leyden, Goltzius, Parmigiano, Della Bella, Callot, and a variety of other masters, which are perfectly original, we may examine those only, which are professedly copies from the pictures of other masters. And then we must observe, that every translator of a poem, however meritorious, falls precisely under the same censure; but how little understanding must that man possess, who would tell us, that Hobbes displayed as great an exertion of genius, in his *Homer done into English*, as Pope, in the elegant translation, which he has given us of that poet, and which is not more generally than justly admired. Admitting (which, I believe, is far from being true,) that the first has adhered to the precise and literal meaning of each word, compared with the original, can it be said, he felt what he wrote, or that the least spark of poetical animation can be found in the whole work? whilst the other enters, as it were, into the soul of the poet, (if I may be allowed the expression) and writes, as Homer might have been supposed to have done, had he been a native of England. What the poet has to do with respect to the idiom of the language, the engraver has also to perform in his translation, for so it may be called, of the original picture upon the copper; with this manifest disadvantage, that he has only one colour given him to express the same harmony and powerfulness of effect, which the painter so happily produces with variety. Would Raphael have spoken so disrespectfully of Marc Antonio, Rubens of Bolswert, or Le Brun of Gerard Audran?—The respect which they paid to these admirable engravers, plainly evinces the contrary.

SECT. III. Prints may naturally be arranged under three general heads: I. Historical and Emblematical Subjects; II. Landscapes; III. Portraits. And all these may easily be subdivided at pleasure.

The different modes of engraving are the following:

In STROKES cut through a thin wax, laid upon the copper, with a *point*, and these strokes bitten or corroded into the copper with *aqua fortis*. This is called *etching*.

In STROKES with the graver alone, unassisted by *aqua fortis*. In this instance, the design is traced with a sharp tool, called a *dry point*, upon the plate; and the strokes are cut or ploughed upon the copper with an instrument, distinguished by the name of a *graver*.

In STROKES, first etched, and afterwards finished with the *graver*: by this expedient the two former methods are united.

In DOTS without strokes, which are executed with the point upon the wax or ground, bitten in with the *aqua fortis*, and afterwards harmonized with the *graver*; by the means of which instrument small dots are made; or with the graver alone, as in the flesh and finer parts, unassisted with the *point*.

In DOTS, first etched, and afterwards harmonized with the *dry point*, performed by a little hammer, called *opus mallei*, or *the work of the hammer*, as practised by Lutma and others.

In MEZZOTINTO, which is performed by a dark barb, or ground, being raised uniformly upon the plate, with a toothed tool. The design being traced upon the plate, the light parts are scraped off by instruments for that purpose, in proportion as the effect requires.

In AQUA TINTA, a newly invented method of engraving. The outline is first etched, and afterwards a sort of wash is laid by the *aqua fortis* upon the plate, resembling drawings in Indian ink, bistre, &c.

On WOOD, performed with a single block, on which the design is traced with a pen, and those parts which should be white carefully hollowed out; and this block is afterwards printed by the letter-press printers, in the same manner as they print a book.

On



On wood, performed with two, three, or more blocks; the first having the outlines cut upon it; the second is reserved for the darker shadows; and the third for the shadows, which terminate upon the lights; and these are substituted in their turn, each print receiving an impression from every block. This mode of engraving is called *chiaro-scuro*, and was designed to represent the drawings of the old masters.

On wood and on copper: in these the outline is engraved in a bold, dark style upon the copper; and two or more blocks of wood are substituted to produce the darker and lighter shadows, as before.

SECT. IV. In criticising upon prints, the following observations may not be unworthy of notice, so far, at least, as they have any tendency to prevent an over-hasty decision with respect to their merit; for certainly no artist is so liable to accidents, which may lead the unwary to misjudge of his works, as the engraver. His plates may be badly printed: copies may be imposed upon the collector for originals; and retouched impressions of no value may be sold for genuine. Neither are these all the disadvantageous circumstances, which should come under our consideration. The works of the artist himself may be unequal, especially when they are exceedingly numerous. In this case, it is absolutely necessary for the collector to see all, or the greater part of the engravings by such a master, or perhaps a prejudicial judgment may be formed from his worst prints, whilst the most excellent remain unseen.

The works of all the old masters lie under these manifest disadvantages; but none more particularly so, than those known by the name of little masters, who are chiefly German artists, and distinguished by the epithet of *little*, from the diminutiveness of their works. Their plates, whilst in good condition, have often been badly printed; but the impressions most generally met with, are such, as are spoiled by retouching, so as not to retain the least shadow of that excellence, which distinguishes the print in its original state.

For these causes I conceive, no decided opinion ought to be formed of the works of an engraver, in general, and of the old masters, in particular, till a number of their prints, and those too fine impressions, have been carefully examined. If these rules were candidly attended to, I am sure the latter would stand much higher in the public estimation, than they do at present.

Prints, if they be original works, may be considered as beautiful, I. With respect to the drawing, the spirit of the composition, or the management of the *claire-obscur*, exclusive of the mechanical part of the execution; and of this species are the painter's etchings; or II. Principally for the excellence of the mechanical part of the engraving, as in the works of Wierix, Beham, and others of the German school especially; or III. For the correctness of design, and freedom of execution, as in those of Henry Goltzius and his contemporaries; or IV. For the beauty of the finishing; and V. When they are copies from the paintings of others, the more striking resemblance they bear to the originals, from which they are taken. And no prints ought absolutely to be thrown aside, if they excel in any one of these particular beauties, however they may be deficient in another. For want of this discrimination, we too frequently see many of the most valuable works of the old masters, and etchings of the finest painters, passed over with contempt by the unskilful, when nothing can be more certain, than that the etchings of Guido, and other great artists, are as excellent in their way, as the most highly finished and striking engravings of Edelinck, Nanteuil, or Poilly.

Neither is it reasonable entirely to condemn the works of an artist, because he followed the established taste of his country. This was a fault too much authorised by custom; but indeed originality of taste is much confined; few, very few, have possessed it; and even of those, all have not been successful. If the style of drawing or composition is not agreeable to the ideas we have formed of excellence in our own mind, shall we entirely pass over the beauties, which may be found either in correctness of drawing, neatness, or harmony of effect? The fertility of invention, and variety of character, which appear in the works of Albert Durer, make great amends for his want of that simplicity and correctness, which is the characteristic of the Italian schools; and his skill in the mechanical
part