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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

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Chap. II. The Examination of the Works of the German Masters continued, from the Fifth Chapter of the Essay on the Art of Engraving in the First Volume.

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C H A P. II.

The Examination of the Works of the German Masters continued, from the Fifth Chapter of the Essay on the Art of Engraving in the First Volume.

I concluded the few general observations, which I made in the former volume, upon the engravings of the early German artists, with some account of the works of Martin Schoen and Israel Van Mecheln. In the present volume I have given two plates; the one representing *St. Sebastian tied to a tree*. (see plate II, copied from a print by Martin Schoen of the same size); and the other *St. Agnes*, from an engraving by Israel Van Mecheln. I have selected the best naked figure I could find by the first artist; but the drawing of the latter is so exceedingly defective, that I chose a draped figure, and one, which, I conceive, is by no means a bad specimen of the abilities of the artist.

It now remains to offer to the perusal of my readers some few observations, in a general manner, upon the state and progress of the art, in Germany and the Low Countries, from the commencement of the sixteenth century; at which period flourished several very eminent artists. Michael Wolgemut was a man of abilities, though the beauty of his works is much obscured by the Gothic stiffness, which prevails in them. To him Albert Durer owed his first instructions in the arts of design and engraving, especially on wood, in which style Wolgemut principally employed himself.

Albert Durer may justly be considered, as one of the most eminent artists that Germany ever produced. His compositions are such, as do him the greatest credit; and in point of expression, the heads of his figures may vie with those of almost any master. This excellent artist appears to have made the works of Martin Schoen the model, upon which he formed his style of engraving on copper: That is, with respect to the mechanical part of it, which was carried to very great perfection by him. Indeed the mechanical part of engraving appears to have been considered by Albert Durer, as a very important object; and his prints possess a clearness and delicacy of stroke, which has been rarely equalled. He has carefully attended to the minutiae, and distinguished, with great precision, the smallest part of his compositions. A beautiful specimen of this kind by him is the celebrated print of *St. Jerom*. The saint is represented in the inside of a room, seated at his writing desk. The perspective of the room is admirable. The floor, the ceiling, the walls of the room, the window, and the furniture, many parts of which are exceedingly minute, are so distinctly expressed, that they have the appearance of objects represented in the camera obscura, saving only the want of variety of colours. Contemporary with Albert Durer was another artist of great eminence, though not entirely equal to him, namely, Lucas Jacobs, better known by the appellation of Lucas Van Leyden. He handled the graver with great facility; and his works are very neat and delicate, and indeed too much so to produce that force of colour, which the deep masses of shadow required. For this reason his prints have not that brilliancy of effect, which is discovered in the works of his friend and competitor, Albert Durer. Another inconvenience arose from the extreme neatness of his engraving, which was, that the plates could not produce many good impressions. Hence it is, that the fine impressions of his works are so exceedingly rare.

Henry Aldegrever, the two Behams, and most of the engravers of this period, distinguished by the appellation of little masters, may be considered as the disciples of Albert Durer; for such of them as did not immediately study under him evidently formed their style of engraving from his works. Henry Aldegrever stands the foremost in the list of his scholars; for George Penz, having first learned the art of engraving in his own country, finished his studies at Rome, under the direction of Marc Antonio. He adopted much of the Italian style, and had the honour to assist Marc Antonio in several of his capital undertakings.

After

After the death of Hans Sebald Beham, the art met with no kind of improvement; but, on the other hand, seems to have declined for a few years. The succeeding little masters did not even attend to the neatness and clearness of the mechanical part of their prints, which had before been considered as one of the great essentials in engraving. They seem as if they had been studying to excel one another in number, rather than in the beauty of their productions. Towards the conclusion of the sixteenth century flourished the Wierix's, who not only regarded excessive neatness, as necessary towards the formation of a fine print, but sacrificed almost every other requisite, except correctness of drawing, to produce it. The works of these artists must excite the admiration of every one, who examines them. The prodigious delicacy, with which they are finished, far surpassed any thing, that had been produced before their time; and from the great number of their engravings we may conclude, that they met with much encouragement. They had a reprehensible custom of making dark outlines to their figures; which, together with the laboured stiffness, apparent in the management of the graver, gives an unpleasing effect to their prints, notwithstanding all their neatness and delicacy. Adrian Collaert, and Hans or John Collaert, his son, flourished also at this time; but they resided a considerable time in Italy, where they acquired a greater degree of taste, Hans Collaert in particular. His works, though not altogether equal in neatness to those of the Wierix's, are superior in taste and expression.

At the same time flourished John and Raphael Sadeler, Philip, Theodore, and Cornelius Galle the elder, Peter de Jode the elder, and the younger, with John Baptist Barbe, and other artists, who may justly be considered as men of great abilities. Generally speaking, they drew correctly, and certainly possessed sufficient genius to have made very considerable improvements in the art of engraving, especially as the greater part of them had the opportunity of studying at Rome. But they seem to have contented themselves with the style of workmanship, which they saw before them; and worked rather for emolument than praise. The prodigious number of bible cuts and religious subjects, in sets, executed separately or conjointly by these artists, almost exceeds belief. They are evidently hasty productions, in which no exertions of genius were employed. And though the defects are not very powerful, the beauties, on the other hand, are by no means very obvious.

While the art of engraving remained in this torpid state in Germany, Henry Goltzius, one of the greatest artists of that country, completed his studies at Rome, and, returning home, adopted a new style of handling of the graver; and his prints possess an astonishing degree of freedom and spirit. They not only excited the attention of the connoisseurs, but the envy of several of his contemporaries, who raised cavils against them, and set up the works of Albert Durer, Lucas of Leyden, and other old masters, as the inimitable models for beauty and excellence. Goltzius, piqued at the ignorance and malice of his opposers, convinced them of his own superior abilities, by composing and engraving several prints, in the style of those masters, in so accurate a manner, as to deceive the judges themselves. By this he proved, that it was not for want of power, that he quitted the style, adopted by those masters; but because he wished to introduce another, infinitely superior. As the works of Goltzius soon after became popular, and his style of engraving was much admired, we shall not wonder, that it became the object of imitation among the artists of that time. John Muller and Jaques Mathem were his disciples; and John Saenredam imitated his style. The works of Muller are specimens of freedom of engraving, carried to very extravagant lengths; and Lucas Kilian followed him, at no great distance. Mathem and Saenredam were more reasonable imitators of the style of Goltzius; and their works possess more delicacy and correctness. Frederic Bloemart was another successful imitator of the style of this great artist. At the commencement of the seventeenth century flourished the two Bolswerts. Their first exertions with the graver were in the style of Goltzius, received probably through the medium of Frederic Bloemart; but under the instruction and patronage of Rubens. They changed that style for one, better adapted to represent the finished and picturesque beauties

