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The Print Collector.

A CHAT WITH A DEALER.

MR. FREDERICK KEPPEL, the well-known print-dealer, who has lately returned from Europe, gave some information of much interest to collectors of engravings and etchings, in a recent interview with a representative of THE ART AMATEUR. Being asked as to what he had secured of special value during his foreign trip, Mr. Keppel said:

"Such engravings as I deal in, having been produced centuries ago, are not, of course, a species of merchandise that can be ordered by the dozen or gross; and of those that are offered, perhaps not more than one in five hundred has any special merit as a work of art, or any high rank in the standard books of reference on the subject. Still another drawback in the way of securing valuable prints is the fact that good things are often held at far more than their market value, and families in which fine engravings have been reverently preserved for generations are very apt to set an extravagant value upon them. But notwithstanding these drawbacks, the fact remains that the ever-growing American demand has been so well responded to that there are perhaps to-day more high-class old engravings for sale in New York than in any other city in the world. During my five months' 'rummage' through Europe, I succeeded in purchasing two specially interesting lots. One was the collection formed by the ex-Queen Christina of Spain, who was grandmother to the reigning King. The royal lady evidently admired the brilliant and laborious technique of such engravers as Wille, Bervic, and Desnoyers, and if it was herself who selected them they certainly do honor to her critical taste, for they are all, without exception, fine. But a more interesting and valuable collection is that of the distinguished Italian engraver, Antonio Peretti, who has recently died in Florence at the great age of eighty-seven. Peretti was the intimate friend of the great engraver, Raphael Morghen, under whom he studied his art. In the collection which I had the good fortune to secure there are a number of presentation proofs by Morghen, Longhi, Toschi, Anderloni, and other distinguished Italian engravers."

"What are the best marts in Europe for purchasing prints?"

"For very costly prints by Dürer and Rembrandt, for portraits of personages who figure in English literature, and for the beautiful works of living English etchers, London is the place. For fine works by the great line engravers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Edelinck, Nanteuil, Masson, and Wille, Paris is the place. Paris, moreover, produces more fine etchings by living artists than all Europe beside. The greatest living French etchers are Léopold Flameng, Charles Jacque, Appian, Lalanne, Bracquemond, and Jacquemart. But there are new men coming to the front every year whose work is so good that they compel the older artists to look to their laurels. Among those rising men, Guérard is conspicuous. At first his work was comparatively neglected, as it was too much of an innovation upon the neat and careful work of his predecessors. He etches to please himself. A few bold strokes lay his idea plainly before you, but for mere prettiness he cares nothing. His 'dry-point' etching of a dead crow is a characteristic example of his work. Of this he printed only twenty proofs and then destroyed the original plate. I spent some pleasant hours in his company, and found the man to be as original as the artist."

"Who are the rising etchers in England now?"

"J. Lumsden Propert, who, like Seymour Haden, is a surgeon; the brothers Slocombe, especially C. P., and R. W. Macbeth, who is also very favorably known as a painter. Propert has evidently formed his style upon that of Seymour Haden, and in some of his forest scenes and marines I think he has, like Shylock, 'bettered the instruction.' Haden himself has just finished a splendid plate, a view of Harlech, in Wales. It is unlike any other work of his, being modelled after Turner's famous Liber Studiorum plates, and like them it is more of a mezzotint than an etching. I always pay for English etchings with an implied protest. They are too dear. A London publisher recommending his wares never tells you what a fine work of art he is showing you, but he is voluble on the fact that 'only forty impressions were taken, and the plate destroyed.'

This is all very well for that large class in England who are actually at a loss what to do with their money; but I feel that it is almost a sin to destroy a plate which might have printed ten times as many impressions, equally good, which might have been sold at one-tenth of the 'fancy' price demanded."

"What is the state of the art in other countries—Italy, Germany, Spain, for instance?"

"The fact is that Paris is like a great magnet, and attracts nearly all the conspicuous talent from other countries. Even Whistler and Haden had to publish their works there before they received recognition in their own country. Similarly the great etcher, Fortuny, who was a Spaniard produced his works in Paris, and the clever Italian, Gilli, also. There is at least one German etcher of the foremost rank who has not produced his works in Paris, I mean Unger. His reproductions of the works of Rubens and other masters are admirable. Of Netherlandish etchers, the most admired is De Gravesande, though Jongkind ranks high also; this latter artist brings out his works in Paris. Our American school is producing some really fine work, and if our etchers keep on, their works cannot fail to become well known and greatly admired by the artists and amateurs of Europe."

A CURIOUS PRINT.

AMONG several noteworthy prints and water-color drawings, included in the portfolios of an old collector, recently bought by Mr. Bonaventure, is a curious and finely-executed line and stipple etching, with the name B. West in script on the plate as engraver, and the name Caspar Moresch (as near as we can read it) as painter. Mr. Bonaventure believes it to be by Benjamin West, and it certainly is old enough and good enough to be his. But here the points in favor of such a presumption end. No biography that we have consulted records that West etched, and what is more perplexing, we can find in no dictionary of painters such a name as Caspar Moresch. On this latter point, however, we do not lay much stress; for the surname on the plate is not clearly decipherable and we may not have read it correctly. It seems impossible that Benjamin West should have etched a picture other than his own, and more improbable that, having used the needle so well, he should not have employed it more freely. We have yet said nothing about the subject of the print. It is this which puzzles us most of all. What does it represent? A beautiful woman in the costume of a lady about a century ago, disrobed below the bosom, with the left hand presses her breast, and from it shoots a bounteous stream at which she seems to be feeding two little birds which she holds in the palm of her right hand. The face is refined in feature and serenely pure in expression. The print is nearly as large as a page of our magazine. Can any of our readers throw any light on its authorship, or on the subject it represents?

RUSKIN ON ETCHING.

IN a letter to The (London) Architect, in December, 1873, upon etching, Mr. Ruskin expounds some of the principles of the art which he had not time to define in his Oxford lectures on engraving. They are as follows:

1. The virtue of an etching is to express perfectly harmonious sense of light and shade, but not to realize it. All fine etchings are done with a few lines.
2. Let your few lines be sternly clear, however delicate or however dark. All blurr and blotch is child's play; a true draughtsman must never be at the mercy of his copper and ink. Drive your line well and fairly home; don't scrawl or zigzag. Know where your hand is going, and what it is doing to a hair's-breadth; then bite clear and clean, and let your last impression be as good as the first. When it begins to fail, break your plate.
3. Don't depend much on various biting; for a true master and a great purpose one biting is enough. By no flux or dilution of acid can you etch a curl of hair or a cloud.
4. For all definite shades of architectural work use pencil or charcoal, or even the pen point.

THE SCHOOL OF RUBENS.

PROFESSOR HENRI HYMANS, the Keeper of the Prints, at Brussels, has written an interesting monograph entitled "Histoire de la Gravure dans l'École de Rubens," a subject of which he has made a particular study. We have not seen the volume, but are willing to accept the estimate of the competent critic of The Athenæum,

who writes: "It is full of important and recondite matter. Of Rubens more than one writer had said, and innumerable students had thought, that he was not only the prophet of a peculiar development in painting; but the chief practitioner of it, so that, like Reynolds in that respect, a whole class of engravers was created in order that his works might be translated into black and white, and his technical motives fairly expounded. Rubens as an etcher was great, his influence lasting. In both respects much was done; his scholars were numerous, but their works were very unequal—sometimes superb and worthy of the master, at other times quite unworthy of themselves. On the whole the marks of the school thus originated and developed cannot be mistaken. Their characteristics are freedom, sumptuousness, some exaggeration, and, above all, 'color' and chiaroscuro. Rubens came in contact with many masters of the burin and the etching needle, including, to say nothing of less distinguished men, L. Vosterman, Pontius, the Bols-werts, the De Jodes, Marinus, Van der Does, and others. His influence spread in Germany, France, and England, and was experienced by some of the best men."

ETCHING ON COPPER.

ATTENTION has lately been drawn to a new process for the production of line or stippled drawings. A copper plate is first coated with bitumen on the turntable, in the same way as in photozincography, and when the bitumen is quite dry, an impression, from a lithographic stone on transfer paper is applied to it; when this paper is removed, we have a copy of the impression in fatty ink on the bitumen surface. This surface is then dusted with fine bronze powder, which adheres to the inked portions, and renders them quite opaque. If, now, the surface be exposed to the light, the bitumen, not covered by the powder, will be rendered insoluble; on the plate being placed in some solution which dissolves the bitumen, the copper will be laid bare in the parts not acted on by light. These parts can be etched in by a concentrated solution of iron perchloride, and when the depressions are sufficiently marked, the action of the mordant is arrested, and all the undissolved bitumen is removed. We have, in the end, an intaglio engraved plate. This process is very well adapted for line or stippled drawings, but it will not answer for the production of those with half tones.

MR. T. H. WARD, in a recent number of The (London) Academy, has a highly commendatory article on the work of American etchers, in which, very justly, he gives credit to The American Art Review for bringing many of them before the public for the first time. He says:

Already some eight or ten have been well represented, and with the help of the excellent catalogues provided by the editor, Mr. S. R. Koehler, one is enabled to see at a glance what their past work amounts to. Among these eight or ten may be mentioned Thomas Moran, one of a family of artists, whose "Pascia Meadows" combines strong imagination with delicacy of touch; J. M. Falconer and H. Farrer, etchers who represent the opposite extremes of boldness and smooth finish; S. J. Ferris, who gives powerful reproductions of Gérôme; J. Foxcroft Cole, a follower of that delightful artist, Ch. Jacque; and Mrs. Merritt. But above them all we are inclined to place Mr. R. Swain Gifford, one of whose plates was appropriately chosen as frontispiece of the opening number of The Review, and whose complete "œuvre" shows him to be a master of his art.

The writer further gives a detailed notice of a "portfolio of Mr. Gifford's etchings." We have not yet seen this publication.

MR. HADEN gives the following hint in regard to framing his recent etchings, "Windsor" and "Greenwich," which is equally applicable to all new impressions: "The impression should be laid under a sunk mount showing an inch and a half of the paper all round, and should not be allowed to touch the glass by about the eighth of an inch. It must not be subject to pressure of any kind till the ink has become thoroughly dry, which will not be the case for some months."

SEYMOUR HADEN'S daring attempt to use mezzotint in combination with etched lines, after the manner of the "Liber Studiorum," in his landscape at the recent black-and-white exhibition in London, has not, according to Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse, been entirely satisfactory. That critic says that the loss of Mr. Haden's skillful work with the needle is more obvious than the gain in chiaroscuro.