

**THE ART AND PRACTICE OF  
ETCHING; WITH DIRECTIONS FOR  
OTHER METHODS OF LIGHT AND  
ENTERTAINING ENGRAVING**

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The art and practice of etching; with directions for other methods of light and entertaining engraving by Henry Alken

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**HENRY ALKEN**

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1849.

A MANUAL  
OF THE  
Art and Practice of Etching.

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AMONG the various forms of imitative art, which, during the past three centuries, have been practically cultivated or freely patronised by the high-born, the accomplished, and the intellectual, that of Etching has occupied a prominent position, and been cherished with especial regard. Easy of attainment, and of unpretentious nature, it might have been supposed that professional Artists would have held it lightly,—esteeming it more as an amusement for the Amateur than a valuable method of fixing and perpetuating their own conceptions. But such are the intrinsic merits, such the attractions, of this charming

Art, that, ever since its discovery, the greatest painters, as well as the most distinguished engravers, have had recourse to it. The majestic genius of Rubens, of Van Dyck, and of Rembrandt, far from disdaining this art, seized eagerly upon it, as a means of expressing with rapidity and effect, the fleeting creations of their teeming fancy. How many an emotion of pleasure does the connoisseur owe to this Art, seeing that it has preserved to him the thoughts of the Great Masters, which they have not, from want of time or means, been enabled to embody in colour! Contemporaneous with the luminaries already named, there were, and since continuously have been, a host of distinguished artists, Dutch, French, and Italian, who practised Etching, and attained to excellence therein. What it is, and by whom cultivated in our own country, and at the present time, scarcely need be told. The exquisite works of Brandard, Burnett, Willmore, Archer, Colonel Baillie, and Cuitt, and the admirable productions of the Etching Club (a Society which comprises several of the most eminent names in British Art.) are well and deservedly known, and par-

ticularly significant of the estimation in which this most pleasing pursuit is held by the master-spirits of Art amongst us. Enough, however, has been said to prove that, although it may be made simply a means of personal entertainment, and no more, this art is capable of extension to a high degree of perfection; and, as the liking for it grows, the hand acquires experience, and the taste matures,—which are the agreeable results that compensate perseverance,—it is impossible to say that the party who commenced this study merely for the sake of amusement will not continue it from ambition, or, at least, from the love of that praise which is the tribute justly paid to an accomplishment wherein excellence has been achieved.

It may well be supposed, that the example of the great artists of their respective times, was not lost upon the high-born and educated of the countries where Art was most esteemed. Whoever takes the trouble to examine the magnificent collection of Etchings in the Print Room of the British Museum, and the portfolios of those who are curious and learned in this particular, will find a profusion of highly merito-



rious Etchings of great age, which neither bear the initial, cipher, anagram, or name, of any known painter or engraver—and there are few of talent unknown—but on the contrary, exhibit that of some one respecting whom history is altogether silent; or, in occasional instances, that of a person eminent by birth or position, whose known accomplishment identifies the work. By whom then were these numerous specimens of superior Art produced? Not by the lower classes, because they were almost universally ignorant even of the rudest elements of education; they must, therefore, of necessity, have been the productions of the high born and the intellectual, since to these only was access afforded to the study.

Etchings being more enduring than either pencil or water-colour drawings, consequently preserve far better than either, and the work of the plumed Italian gentleman or haughty signora, who fluttered round Lorenzo the Magnificent or Sixtus the Fifth, the gay cavalier and courtly dame of the time of Louis the Fourteenth, still survives to affect us with wonder or pleasure, sometimes with both, proving the truth of the poet's exclamation,

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever!”

The agreeable Art of Etching, it is well known, has of late been pretty freely cultivated in the highest circles of English society—especially amongst Ladies; and the study is rapidly extending. The recent proceedings for an injunction in the Court of Chancery (though the occasion for them, inasmuch as it was displeasing to Royalty, ought to be, and, indeed, very generally is, sincerely deprecated), have disclosed to the world the example of an illustrious Sovereign and her Royal Consort amusing the small leisure which affairs of State leave at their disposal, with this most entertaining and refined Art. Such an example will not, and should not, be without its effect. To facilitate, and place at every one's command, the means for pursuing this delightful Art, is the object of the present work; and its writer is not without a confident hope that those who, under his guidance, enter upon this study, will, in the end, thank him for assisting them to an accomplishment, which, from the first, will generously repay its exercise, whether it be pursued from a pure love of Art, or for no better purpose than to while away the tedium of a wet day, or of se-

clusion in the country. And this, above all other imitative Arts attainable without professional study and continued application, has one especial and great recommendation, that the party who practices it has the consciousness that when the subject in hand is completed, there is scarcely a limit to the number of copies to be obtained from it. Unlike a pencil or water-colour drawing, unlike a painting in oils, or a work in *marble*, which can only gratify those who at one time examine it, the impressions from an etching may be multiplied by thousands, to grace the portfolios, the albums, and the scrap-books of near and distant relatives and friends, and to awaken reminiscences of the etcher and giver when otherwise they would not arise.

Without further remark in this direction, I proceed to a description of the materials used in etching, and the methods of employing them.

Satisfied that the Art may be carried on without greater inconveniences than painting in oil, or even water-colour drawing, and decidedly less unpleasantly in this respect than the manufacturing of those large *Black Lead Heads*, that so lately were in fashion with