

George William Curtis -

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AMERICAN ETCHERS.

THE term etching has a definite and limited significance too often disregarded in popular speech. Its maltreatment seems the more inexcusable when we remember that it is not a word originally wider in meaning which has been narrowed by the custom of the studio into limited technical applicability; but that its etymological, dictionary force is at one with its employment in artistic parlance. And as it denotes not an effect but a process, there should not be the least confusion with regard to it. Even if it were possible—as it is not—to produce identical effects by other methods, no work so produced could be called etched work. *To etch* comes from the same root as *to eat*, the Greek *ἐσθω*. Only such prints as are made from plates that have been acted upon by acid—bitten into, eaten away—are to be named etchings. To produce a print of this kind, the artist takes a plate—usually of copper, though sometimes of zinc—and coats it with a preparation formed of wax and other ingredients. Upon this “ground,” after it has been blackened with smoke so that his strokes will show more clearly, he draws his subject with a sharp-pointed instrument called a “needle” or “point,” using just sufficient pressure to remove the ground along the line of his strokes without scratching the metal underneath. The plate is then immersed in a shallow pan of acid called a “bath.” This acid, or “mordant,” acts upon the uncovered portions of the plate—upon the artist’s lines, that is—but has no effect upon the portions still protected by the ground. When the “biting” is accomplished, the plate is cleaned, inked, and printed on a roller-press. This is the bald theory of etching; but its practice is a much more complicated affair than might be thought. Variety in the blackness or strength

of lines cannot be produced—as in pen-drawing, for example—by varying degrees of pressure given to the draughtsman’s tool. This can do no more than remove the ground with a finer or a blunter point, thus producing lines which would vary in width, but scarcely at all in blackness, were all acted upon to an equal extent by the acid. But all are not thus equally acted upon. The palest, finest lines in a print have been bitten for a very short period; the darkest, strongest ones for a comparatively long period; and all intermediate lines for periods of intermediate lengths. There are various ways of obtaining these results. In one—the traditionary process employed by the great etchers of other days—the subject is completely drawn upon the plate, which is then immersed in the acid long enough to bite the lines intended to be palest. Then the plate is removed from the bath, the finished lines are “stopped out” with protecting varnish, so that the acid can no longer touch them, and the biting is resumed, these “stoppings out” being continued until all the desired gradations have been successively arrived at.*

Another process, usually called the “continuous,” consists in drawing at first upon the plate only such lines as are intended to be darkest, biting these, cleaning and re-grounding the plate, laying and biting the lines of the next degree of strength, and so proceeding until the plate is finished. A third process, first brought into favor by Mr. Haden, presupposes the use of an acid which works rather slowly. In this the untouched plate is immersed, and the etcher’s work is done upon

* Of course the *order* in which the gradations are secured may be varied to suit individual desires. But it is impossible here to dwell upon the manifold minor resources of the art.



J. HEWHITNEY SC.

JOE. (JAMES A. M. WHISTLER.)*

individual American workmen, even to hint at the peculiar characteristics of the etcher's art, the peculiar gifts necessary for its successful practice. But I must try, though in the fewest words. Why, in the first place, is etching held to be a much more "artistic" process than any other manner of engraving? Why does it attract the hand of original, creative artists who leave other processes to their special students? Simply because it is infinitely *freer* than any other multiplying process, being, indeed, freer than any other *point* process whatsoever, as the etching ground offers even less resistance to an artist's touch than paper to the pen or pencil. It is the only graphic process by which an artist can *improvise*

—can put his own thoughts—directly, and with such ease that his most fleeting vision can be fixed and the least idiosyncrasy of his handling be preserved—upon a plate from which many duplicates may be printed. And, of course, it is this characteristic which makes etching so seductive to the artist, and which makes its results so interesting to the amateur.

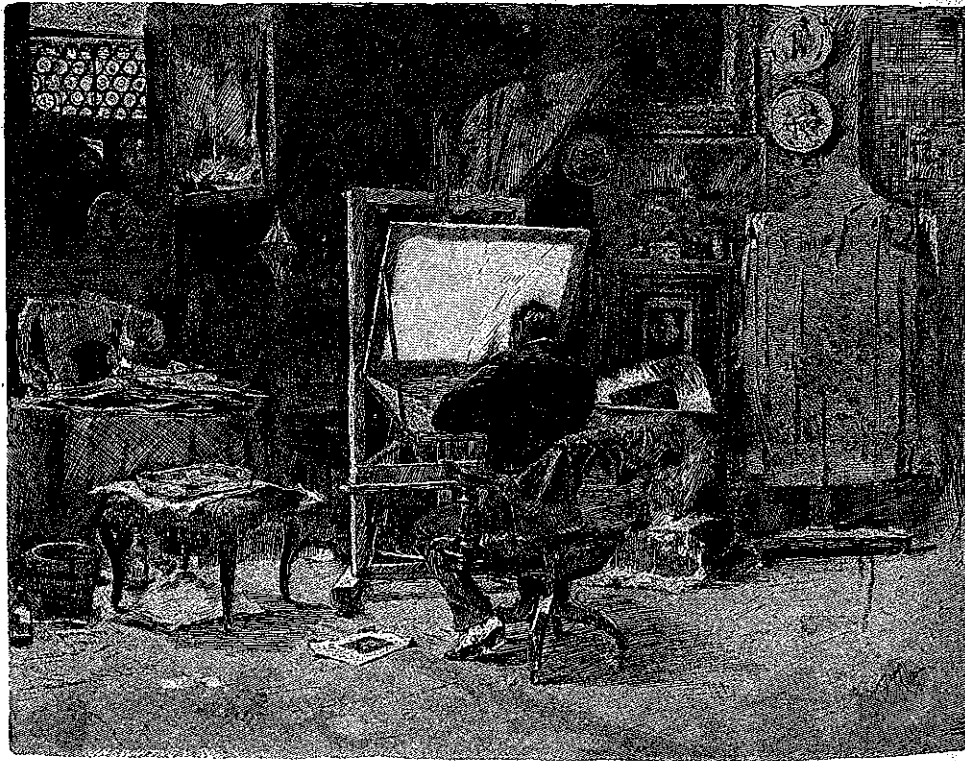
Another charm of etched work—one which is less easy to explain in words, however, and which cannot be fully understood from the wood-cut reproductions here put before the reader—lies in the fact that the lines obtained by it differ vastly *in kind* from those obtained by any other engraver's process. Its blacks are deeper and richer and more velvety than

* Reprinted from this magazine for August, 1879.

it through the liquid. Of course, here also the strongest lines will be laid in first and the work carried on gradually up to the very palest. This process has many advantages,—and not alone in its saving of trouble,—but it requires such mastery of the art, so perfect a foreknowledge of just what effects are desired and just what methods must be used to get them, that it is only fit for the most able hands. There are other methods and combinations of methods in use, but they cannot be here described. Enough has been said, I think, to show the general technical principles of the art. But a few words must be added with reference to the completion of a plate. The reader will understand that the biting plays as important a part in an etching as the draughtsmanship proper, since upon it depend all the artist's effects of tone and color and aerial perspective. But even when the last biting is finished, the plate is not of necessity complete. It may afterward be worked upon: with the "dry point,"—that is, with the needle, in lines that *cut* the copper, and are not submitted to the acid at all, and that give a peculiar effect of their own; with a line-engraver's burin; with the "roulette,"—a tiny wheel that gives results analogous to those of mezzotinting; with pumice-stone, to roughen

the surface; and in more than one way besides. Moreover, when the plate leaves the etcher's hands, the printer often has his special work to do. The simplest way to print an etching is, of course, to wipe the surface of the plate quite clean. Then nothing prints save the lines which hold the ink below the surface and into which the paper is driven by the action of the press. But to obtain *flat* tints, films of ink, of greater or less strength, are often left on or applied to portions of the plate, which films print tints of greater or less blackness. Often, as in the etching by Mr. Blum here reproduced, this so-called "artificial" or "artistic" printing plays a very important rôle. And some of my readers may remember the many "monotypes" which have been exhibited during the past year. These are produced by artificial printing *alone*—unassisted by any etched lines. Of course, with this process—as its name implies—a plate can only give a single impression; and equally of course, an etched plate, whether with or without added inked spaces, must be inked anew before the taking of each impression.

It is difficult, in the short space at my command and hampered by the desire to reserve as many pages as possible for a notice of



A MODERN ETCHER. (ROBERT BLUM.)

those possible to any other linear process (whether a multiplying process or not), and its lights by contrast higher and more brilliant. Thus a wider range for the translation of color is at command. Moreover, an etched line, of whatever degree of strength or delicacy, has a peculiar quality of its own. An engraved line, cut slowly and painfully into the metal, will not only be stiffer, more mechanical, less autographic, than a line cut swiftly and easily into yielding wax, but when printed, from its even, monotonous structure, will always look cold and hard. But the action of acid is *not* even and mechanical. A bitten line is full of slight irregularities, ragged and minutely uneven; and when printed it will have far more of life and vivacity and accent. A lover of etching finds in the contemplation of a single strong, well-bitten line a pleasure akin to that found by the amateur of painting in the contemplation of a single strong, well-laid brush-stroke—a pleasure which has no equivalent if we study an engraved line in isolation. There is nothing at all in linear work (whether engraved or merely drawn) that compares with an etching for freedom, strength, and personal expression; and there is nothing like it in monochromatic work for warmth, variety, tenderness, and beauty of color.

A word must, however, be said as to the limitations of the art—limitations which its lovers will hardly acknowledge to be drawbacks. As it is a strictly linear process it cannot cope with processes where tints and masses are employed in the rendering of full and perfect tone. Almost perfect tonality can, it is true, be accomplished with the needle and its various aids, but only with much labor and a sacrifice of frank, linear expressiveness. Of the degree to which excellence has been attained in this respect, by modern "reproductive" etchers especially, I shall say a brief word later on. Here I will only note that the greatest original etchers are usually content to give tone and gradation in a partial, arbitrary, and strictly interpretative way, since by so doing they retain rapidity of handling and—the prime excellence of the art—strong linear expression. In a word, they think more of form and color and freedom than of complete tonality.

When we begin to examine etched work in particular examples, we shall prize most highly those prints in which its characteristic qualities are most perfectly exhibited, its limitations most loyally respected,—since, as Mr. Hamerton well says, an art is at its best when most thoroughly *itself*. Those etchings which are the freest and most personal in handling and the richest in color, and in

which the line is most strongly and expressively employed, will be the finest. Of course, as in all other arts so with this one, there is something more than technical skill to be considered: there is the idea which it expresses or the sentiment which it interprets. But as etching is not an imitative art, even to the comparative degree in which some arts may be so esteemed, as it is the most boldly and frankly interpretative of all graphic modes,—original, valuable ideas must have existed where really fine workmanship is seen. The etcher's translation into expressive linear language of something which has shown no similar lines in nature, presupposes a power of clear analysis. And in so interpretative an art, where very many facts in every theme must be omitted, their effect dispensed with altogether or merely suggested to the observer's memory, the converse power of synthesis is implied as well. An etcher who speaks strongly must speak concisely, significantly, rapidly, and, if I may so express it, typically or symbolically. Therefore he must be possessed by a clear idea of the things he wants to say, looking to it that they are not so many as to confuse or so alien as to confound his peculiar form of speech. And so it is that when we see in an etching really strong and individual workmanship, it vouches for intellectual qualities as well—it presupposes, by its very existence, clear, individual ideas or characteristic sentiments in the etcher, with the presence of the high artistic powers to which I have just referred,—the powers of analysis, condensation, and interpretation. It was his recognition of these facts which made Jules Dupré exclaim: "Artists paint on their good days and their bad, but etch on their good ones only." And such facts and such testimony may well dispose of the too prevalent idea that etching is an "easy" art,—one fitted for the casual attention of any dilettante.

And these facts imply that perhaps the chief thing to be prized in an etcher's work is *economy of labor*. As the art is essentially a free and rapid one, and as it is difficult and (so far as the action of the acid is concerned) always more or less uncertain, one's effects should be produced with as much simplicity as possible. An elaborate, patiently worked-up plate is never as delightful as one executed with more freedom, with less expenditure of time and effort,—provided, of course, that the desired effect has been secured. Work done with few lines and vital ones, its meaning suggested by subtile "short-hand" methods, which leave the white paper to play an important part in the general result, appeals to most lovers of the art with especial force and

charm. I should repeat, perhaps, that I am speaking now of original etchings only—of "painter etchings" as distinguished from reproductive work.

I hope the reader has not found his patience too sorely tried by so many technical explanations. He must remember that we cannot understand an artist's speech in all its meaning or appreciate one-half his skill, unless we know how he has been helped and limited by his tools. And with regard to so artistic and so peculiar a process as etching, such knowledge is doubly needful.*

The history of etching is a peculiar one. Though brought into notice by Albrecht Duerer and his contemporaries on both sides of the Alps, the full possibilities of the art were first developed a century later by Dutch and Flemish artists. The greatest of these as a painter was the greatest also as an etcher—the completest master of the art who has yet been born. In Rembrandt we find all the endowments of an etcher in such force, and find them displayed along so many lines,—with so many results of surprising unlikeness but of equal excellence,—that a study of his work alone would serve to show nearly all of which the art is capable. During a long period which succeeded the extinction of the great Netherland schools and lasted into our own century, the art fell into almost complete disuse and into completer public disesteem. But when a growing love of "romantic" and "picturesque" tendencies in art opposed itself to the insipidities, the "classicism," and the formalities of preceding generations, modern artists were inspired by the etched as well as by the painted work of their great Dutch predecessors. Delacroix, Charles Jacque, and Daubigny were among the first to re-create an art most admirably adapted to express what in their time had become the prevailing artistic mood. Méryon, one of the greatest etchers of our day, was at work in 1850, and with him a host of scarcely inferior workmen. And after the establishment of the Second Empire, etchers were recognized as a special class of exhibitors at the Paris *Salons*.

Strictly speaking, the art revived a little earlier in England than in France, but with so much less of truth and energy that the

English school was soon outstripped by the Parisian, to which all others are even yet inferior. Not only are etchers more numerous in France than in any other country and their products far more widely appreciated, but these last are, as a rule, more original and various and in greater conformity to the true spirit of the art. I do not forget that one or two of the very ablest modern etchers have been Englishmen, but, nevertheless, my words hold true of French etchers as a class. And it is, therefore, a matter of congratulation that our own men have started in French rather than in English paths, though by no means in a servile or an imitative spirit.

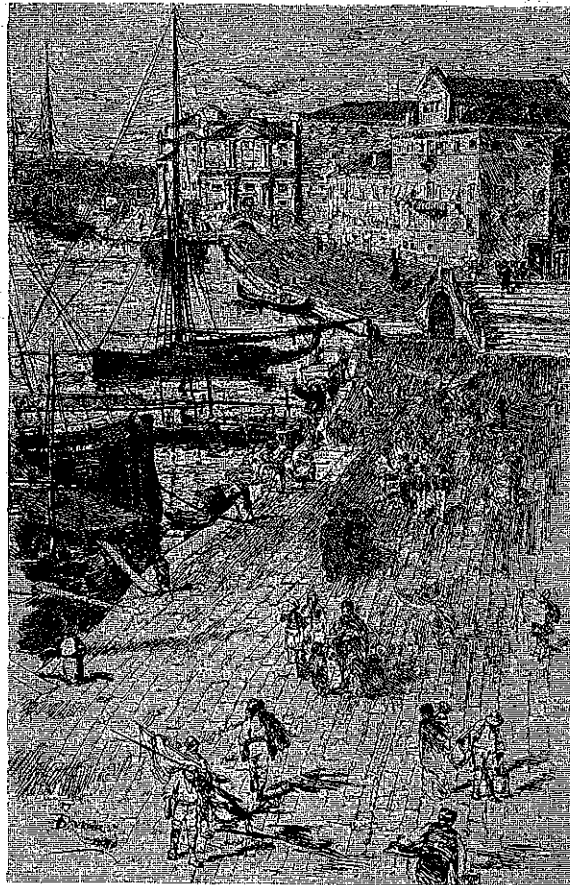
If we consider now the brief history of etching in America, here, too, it will be found to have had its ups and downs. An exhibition of American etchings, held at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, in the spring of 1881, showed that as early as the thirties and forties there had been etchers in this country. Among the names of these long-forgotten pioneers we read some which are quite unfamiliar; some, like that of William Dunlap, the first historian of American art, which are associated with quite other things; and some which are of artists who, like Edwin White, have since gone over to the majority, or who, like Mr. Falconer and George L. Brown, still live and work among us. It would be too much to say that any of these men were etchers in the true sense of the word, with the exception, I think, of Mr. Falconer; still less were they etchers of originality or force. Usually they drew upon the copper with little idea of its unique requirements and with results of no artistic value. But their aspirations should be held in grateful recollection none the less, for theirs was the day of small things,—a time when every earnest student of art must have had an appreciable influence in a community where his fellows were so few.

A name which should not be forgotten is that of Edwin Forbes, who published* a large portfolio of etchings called "Life Studies of the Great Army," containing forty plates illustrating the life of the Union armies during the years 1861-65. They are not executed in the true "etcher's spirit" or with great technical skill, but they are clever and interesting none the less, and will have historic value as the most complete and characteristic contemporary record of our military life. Mr. Forbes's work won foreign praise, and caused him to be elected a member of the French Etching Club and an honorary foreign member of the old London Etching Club as well.

In the year 1866 a spasmodic interest in

* In what year I cannot say, but they were copyrighted in 1876.

* For complete instruction in the theory and history of the art, the reader is referred to Mr. Hamerton's delightful volume, "Etching and Etchers." His "Etcher's Handbook" gives full directions for its practice, but should be read, not only by those who aspire to work, but also by those who wish to understand the work of others. Lalanne's book on "Etching," translated and annotated by Mr. S. R. Koehler, may also be recommended to every student, and much information may be got from Mr. Hamerton's essay on Mr. Haden's work in this magazine for August, 1880.

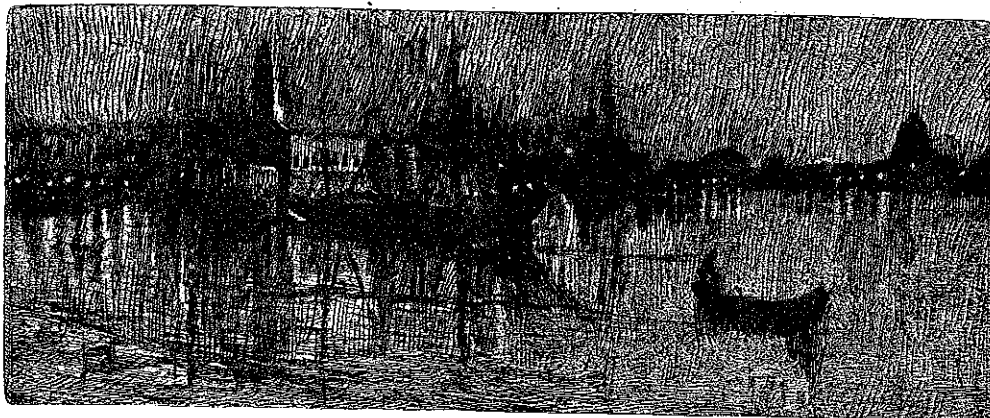


RIVA DEGLI SCHIAVONI, VENICE. (FRANK DUVENECK.)

the art was prompted by a M. Cadart, who established in New York what he called a "French Etching Club," and whose instructions drew about him some of the younger artists of the day. But there followed another apathetic period, and it is only within very recent years that the art has shown any real, spontaneous activity likely to result in vigorous and fruitful growth. The year which followed that of the Centennial Exhibition, when so many unaccustomed eyes had been led to look with interest at things of art, may almost be called an epoch in the history of American development. In 1877, the torpid National Academy precincts saw the advent of certain young men from Munich who caused a great rattling of dry bones at the moment, and who proved but the advance guard of a whole battalion of fresh and eager painters. And, what more nearly concerns us here, it was this year which saw the birth of the "New York Etching Club," an association formed by a few earnest students of the art to incite activity by brotherly reunions and to spread its

results by annual exhibitions. The young society went through that struggle for existence which seems ordained for babes of every sort,—even for those which, like this artistic infant, are well fathered and tenderly watched over. The public was indifferent, and some of the Club's own members were too much absorbed in other work even to heed that condition of membership which prescribed that each should produce at least two plates every year. But though its survival was due to the pains and sacrifices of a few men who deserve well of the republic, the Etching Club is now prosperous and busy, and has been more potent than any other influence in aiding the progress of the art among us and in winning the public to its love.

An event which should be named as having worked with vigor toward the same good ends was the establishment, in 1879, of the "American Art Review." Its editor, Mr. S. R. Koehler, was especially anxious to foster etching in America, and gave with each monthly number of the magazine original



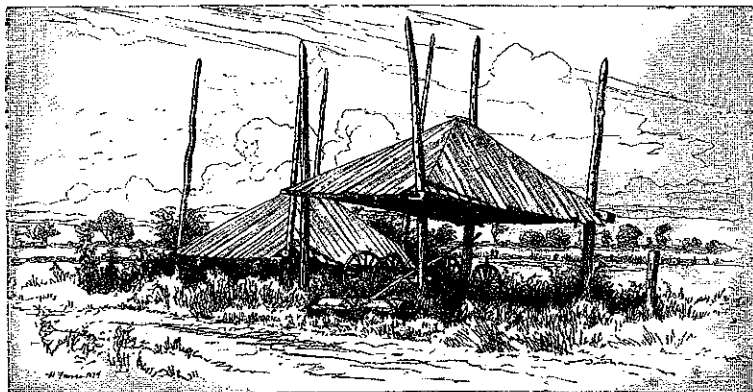
A WET EVENING IN VENICE. (OTTO H. BACHER.)

etchings by native workmen, accompanied by clear critical notices from his own pen. During the two years of the "Review's" most regrettably brief career it did much to benefit both the artist and the public, and its discontinuance was, in the words of the Etching Club itself, "a bereavement to the American etcher." In the spring of 1881, as I have said, an exhibition of American etchings was held in Boston, chiefly owing to the exertions of Mr. Koehler. At the same time, our workmen were winning their first foreign laurels. In the month of May was held in London the first exhibition of the English "Society of Painter-Etchers." The prints solicited from American artists caused such general surprise and were so cordially praised by the best foreign judges that a thrill of pride must have stirred every needle in this country. No less than nine or ten Americans—Mrs. Thomas Moran, Messrs. Thomas Moran, Farrer, Falconer, Swain Gifford, James Smillie, Bellows, Parrish, F. S. Church, and, I think, Frank Duveneck—were at once elected members of the new society, one print by each being chosen for its collection. Mrs. Moran's "Goose-pond," here reproduced, was one of the "diploma" pictures thus selected.

The exhibition held in New York last winter under the patronage of the Club, though not confined to the work of its members, was a surprise even to those who had watched with appreciative eyes the rapid progress of the art among us. Two rooms were filled with prints signed by fifty-three American names. Most of them were more than satisfactory, and some of them were quite admirable. We may not be able to count as yet any name of the highest rank save that of Mr. Whistler. But we must remember that, as Mr. Hamerton says, great etchers are produced at about the rate of two or three to a generation. And in an art so essentially artistic, and

so exacting and peculiar in its requirements, there are many places below the very highest which admirable workmen alone can fill.

One or two external influences have worked so palpably to encourage etching in America, that they also must be mentioned before I pass from this brief history of our school to a briefer criticism of the work it has thus far done. Mr. Hamerton's teaching is one such influence. It would be hard to compute the good done by his book,—which won a sudden wide popularity very unusual to volumes of its sort,—both in prompting artists to take up the point, and in telling the public how to appreciate their efforts. Mr. Haden's etchings have worked strongly in the same direction, not only in and by themselves, but through the benefits their success has conferred upon the least of Mr. Haden's brethren in art as well as upon himself. It is not necessary here to dwell upon the degree of that success or upon the merit which secured it. Just now, when Mr. Haden has so recently come to visit us, the most casual reader may be supposed to know something of the one and of the other. Before the day of that success it was difficult indeed to sell modern etchings in England or America. But Mr. Haden opened the market to all good workmen, for he opened the eyes of his countrymen and our own. It is hoped and believed that his visit will give a fresh impulsion to the etcher's art among us. The mere presence of a great man has an inspiring effect upon his fellow artists; and the words of such an one, whether speaking in print or from the lecture platform, appeal to a more receptive audience than is reached by a whole chorus of lesser voices. Mr. Whistler's influence is another that should not be forgotten in a summary of the things which have helped us on our way. He is an American artist and so must be discussed



HAY-RICKS. (H. FARRER.)

its display. While our art is still so young and so rapidly developing, it cannot be too often said that all hope for its future as a characteristic national school must lie in the willingness of our men to interpret the life which gave them birth, and to which—in spite of foreign residence and training—their spirits must be most akin. Nor need the American etcher, by the way, be the man to complain that nature so decrees. Admirable material for his art lies ready to his hand,—especially in our great harbors and in our coast lands, with their long reaches of sand and rock, their changeful skies, their rugged, wind-torn growths of stem and foliage, their quaint forms of hull and sail, their tangled lines of mast and cordage, and the picturesqueness of their weather-beaten little towns, with the irregular shapes and strong outlines proper to wooden structures no longer in the ugly pride of newness. It is fortunate indeed that our men see the value of these things—fortunate for themselves as well as for the national repute, since every worker does his best when most at home with his subject-matter, and since, moreover, there is no such spur to originality of expression—

that chief of charms in etching—as freshness of material. We cannot be the parrots of any other man if we are saying something that none has said before.

Mr. Whistler's name is, of course, the first that should be mentioned in a list of American etchers. Though most of his art education was obtained in Paris, and though his long residence in England has caused him to be identified with the younger English school, Whistler is an American by birth and breeding; and—what is of more importance in deciding his artistic nationality—he is, it seems to me, quite peculiarly American in his temperament. He is one of the very first few among living etchers, and his plates assisted those of Mr. Haden in the good work of bringing the etcher's art once more into wide popularity. Mr. Whistler cares little for orthodox "composition," and does not often try for even approximate tonality, but in individuality, in sentiment, and in free, frank, artistic, and "telling" use of the line, he has no superior among the moderns and few equals in any age. His work is at times extremely strong, at times supremely delicate, and always wonderfully vital and original.



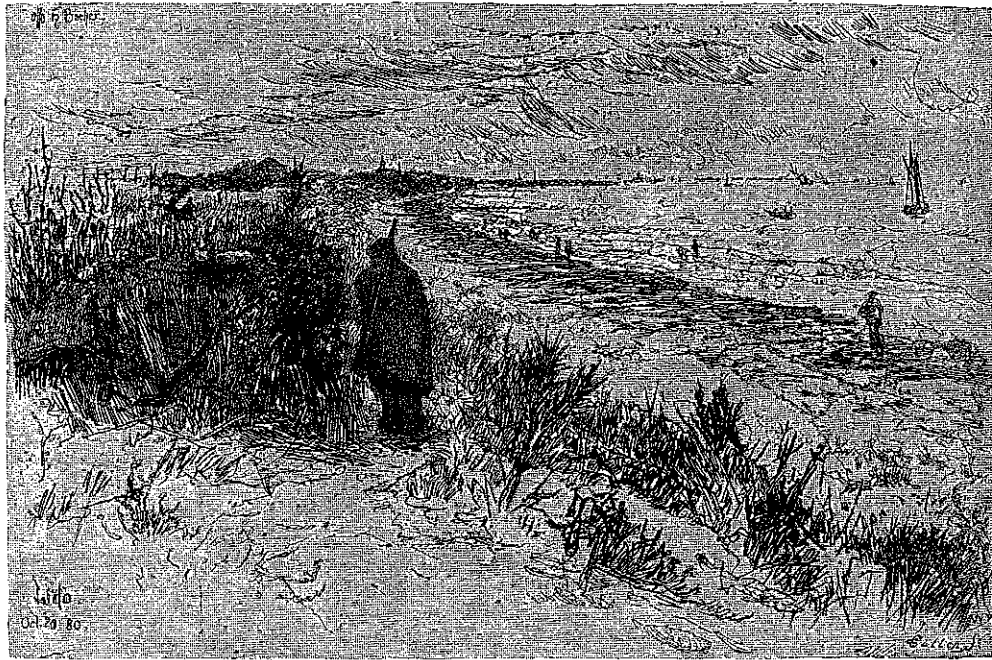
AN OCTOBER DAY. (R. SWAIN GIFFORD.)

with more of detail. First, however, I would say a word as to the characteristics of our school in general,—for it is, I think, sufficiently independent and sufficiently well-established to have some that are worthy of the name.

One of the chief temptations which assail an artist in our day is the temptation to make a show of boldness and rapidity and synthesis if the real things are not at his command,—to work in a rough and careless or pretentious way, which, to untrained eyes, may pass for the freedom and vigor and breadth of a master hand. And as etching is an art where freedom is especially prized, and where, from the strictly interpretative nature of the method, the public may find

best things. As a school they have begun conscientiously and soberly, and are therefore more likely to work their way to complete mastery than if they had begun in careless over-confidence or willful posturing.

Another fact which has struck me most favorably is that as a rule our men show a very just instinct in the choice of their material. There is no kind of material, scarcely an "effect" of any sort, which may not be attempted with success in etching,—which has not been successfully interpreted by the great men of one day or of another. But it is nevertheless true, with this art as with all others, that certain things are by nature best adapted to its use. From the description of



SEA-SHORE, LIDO, VENICE. (OTTO H. BACHER.)

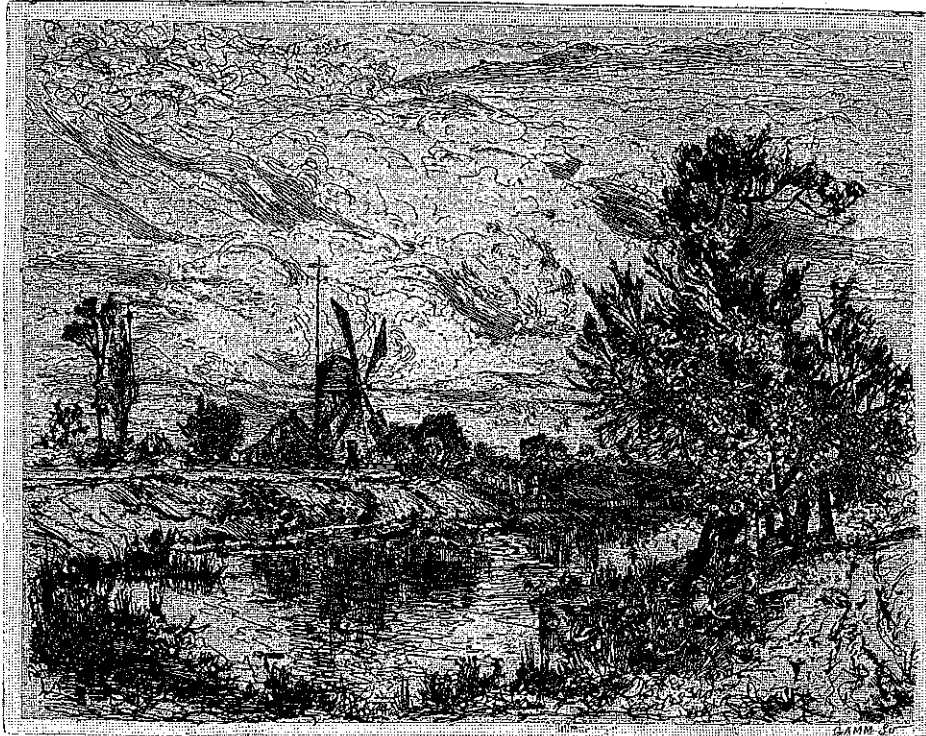
it difficult to distinguish between an almost arbitrary yet truthful and brilliant interpretation of nature like one of Mr. Haden's, and a "free" but meaningless scribble on the copper,—it was to be feared that our young etchers might fall into sins of a careless or pretentious sort. But such has not been the case. When they do sin it is usually in the way of too much timidity, too little personality and force of handling, too much useless elaboration, too little abstraction and condensation and insistence upon the vital structure of their subject. They have not always conquered the possibilities of their art in the way of breadth and strength and originality; but they have not often travestied these

the process it will be felt that it must work most easily and surely upon things which can be expressed by few and powerful lines and simple tonic schemes. Form and color are its strongholds; strength and directness its great virtues; and, as Charles Blanc says, "It is attracted most by everything that is irregular, *bizarre*, incomplete, unexpected, disordered, or in ruin." And with these requirements our etchers seem to be in unison.

There is still a third tendency to be discovered in our work which cannot be too highly praised. Our best men—with the exception of Mr. Whistler and a few who have been inspired by him and Venice—have learned their art at home and have chosen local themes for

His strength is nervous and brilliant and incisive, not massive like Mr. Haden's; but his utmost delicacy has never a hint of commonplace or weakness. Every stroke has meaning, and each is set with beautiful skill and rare artistic feeling. His best-known plates—a series representing the Thames in and about London—had, at the time of their publication, some twelve years back, a quite noteworthy influence in showing what may

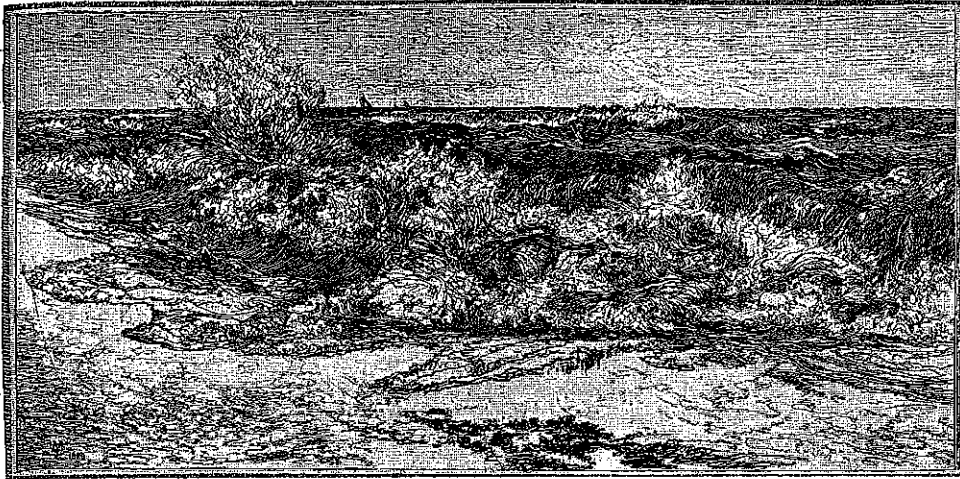
his products are of an original sort. It is hard to explain such differences in words; but I may say that his plates are more massive, more full of detail and color, while showing less individuality of sentiment and a less free and graceful linear beauty than Mr. Whistler's. He is, too, less of an "impressionist" and more of a "realist,"—if I may use these words now consecrated to meanings which they but imperfectly convey. Some of Mr. Duveneck's



A GOOSE-POND—EAST HAMPTON, LONG ISLAND. (MARY NIMMO MORAN.)

be done with materials essentially modern and supposedly unpicturesque. His figure and portrait etchings are, to me, the finest that have come from any living hand. Mr. Whistler has stood, by the fact of his foreign residence, outside the main current of the art as developed in America; but he has had a strong direct influence upon some few of our men, as well as a stronger indirect influence upon the art in general. Of late years he has worked largely in Venice, and has had about him there from time to time a group of younger workmen who, while not imitating him in any servile fashion, yet show the impress of his example. Among them is Mr. Duveneck—far too strong a man to be beholden even to a Whistler for thoughts or manner. Though doubtless inspired by Whistler's plates to work from similar themes,

large plates are among the best things done in recent years, and are quite wonderful in the way they reproduce the color and busy stir and strongly contrasted effects of modern Venice. Next, perhaps, I may speak of Mr. Otto Bacher, a young artist who worked at first in a simple, quiet style, and from simple pastoral subjects, but who, since his Venetian visits, has adopted a bolder, stronger manner and tried more complicated themes. His aims are very much the same as those of Mr. Duveneck, but he is not quite so skillful as the elder artist in his management of the vigorous, crowded lines which they both delight in. Mr. Bacher has usually etched direct from nature. At first he worked in the bath, but while in Venice he found the older process of biting and stopping out indoors to be more convenient. Other young men who have done



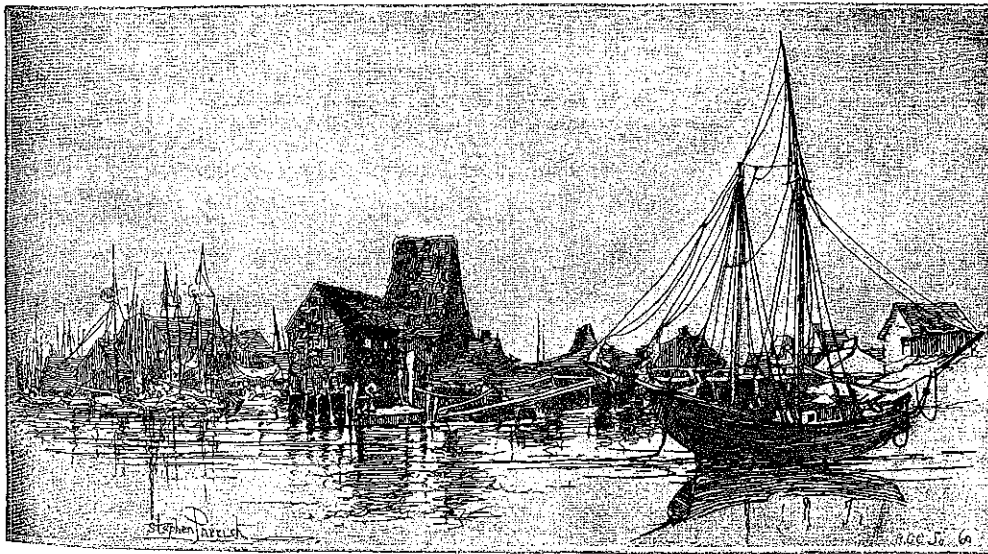
THE BREAKING WAVE. (THOMAS MORAN.)

good work from similar themes are Messrs. Corwin, Wendell, Rosenberg, and Hopkins.

It should be noted—as a happy sign once more—that, from Whistler and Duveneck down to their last young pupil, it is not the Venice of tradition or of fantasy which has inspired the needle, but the Venice of to-day,—that modern life where the nineteenth century utilizes the relics of the *cinque cento*; where great ships loom up amid the hurrying gondolas, and where smoke and steam play their not ignoble part in the gorgeous panorama of Venetian skies.

Turning from this little band of clever workmen we find few American etchers who have chosen foreign themes, and not one

who, if so choosing upon occasion, has done his best work thereupon. Mr. Henry Farrer, for example, one of the earliest and most prolific of our etchers, has tried subjects of many sorts, but all of local flavor, producing his best plates, perhaps, when depicting scenes in and about the harbor of New York. His early work was very careful and elaborate, but he has gradually made his way to far greater simplicity and far greater power. I would especially name several plates with dark hulls relieved against a brilliant evening or morning sky, as strikingly effective and thoroughly good in workmanship. The "Hayricks" here reproduced is not very characteristic of his most individual mood or choice



GLOUCESTER FERRY. (STEPHEN PARRISH.)

of theme. But it has seemed better,—in this as in more than one other instance,—to choose for reproduction such a plate as the wood-engraver could give most successfully, rather than one which, while intrinsically finer, would suffer more by interpretation into another art.

In his etched as in his painted work, Mr. Swain Gifford goes most often to our low coast-lands for his subject-matter. In choice

this is the most perfect plate, in sentiment and in execution, that has yet been done in America, though less brilliant and immediately "effective" than some others. It was chosen by the English Society as Mr. Gifford's "diploma" print. Mr. Gifford usually finishes his work from nature, and employs the oldest processes of the art; but sometimes he works by the "continuous" method.

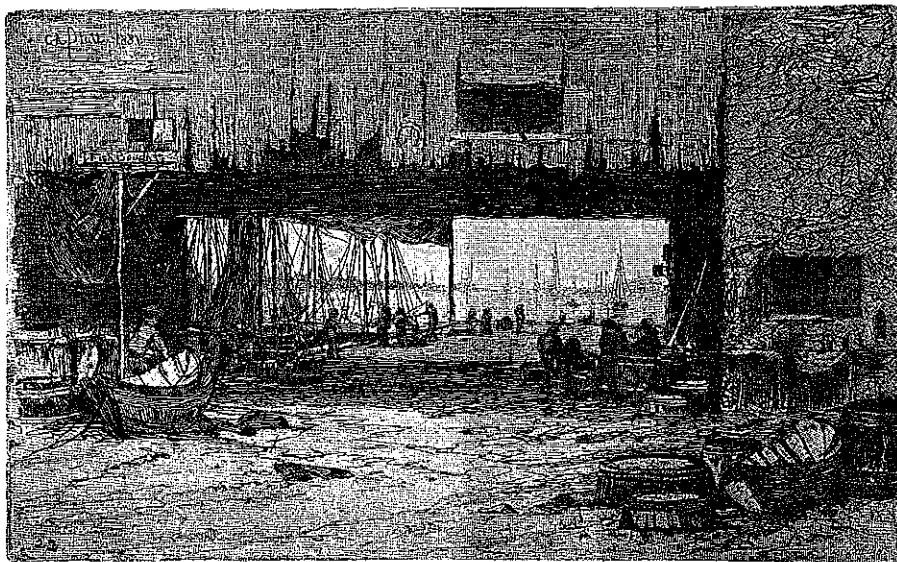
Mrs. Moran is, as yet, the only woman who



AN AMERICAN VENICE. (JOSEPH PENNELL.)

of theme he is peculiarly happy, and his handling combines both decision and delicacy to an unusual degree. It is difficult and might be unjust to use absolute superlatives when speaking of men so nearly on a par as our best etchers—to name one as superior to all the others. But I shall keep within a quite undisputed fact in saying that there is not one among them who shows a truer feeling for the requirements of this peculiar art than Mr. Gifford; who etches more truly in the etcher's spirit; who knows so exactly what to omit and what to insist upon, and thus produces such complete effects by such simple and synthetic means. His finest plate, to my eyes, is the "Pandaram Salt Works,"—most remarkable for quiet simplicity of manner and fullness of meaning, and for a truly artistic management of line and detail. I am only citing, of course, an individual preference; but to me,

is a member of the New York Etching Club, and no name stands higher on its roll. Her work would never reveal her sex—according, that is, to the popular idea of feminine characteristics. It is, above all things, direct, emphatic, bold,—exceeding in these qualities, perhaps, that of any of her male co-workers. The fine plate called "Solitude," published in the "American Art Review," in 1881, with its tall, thin tree-trunks cutting sharply against a back-ground half dark foliage and half pale sky, and its solid, well-contrasted effects of light and shadow, is a preëminently manly piece of work. The "Goose-Pond," here reproduced, is quite as good, though not so original in motive, while the largest plate yet etched by her, the "Twilight," shown at the New York Exhibition of 1882, is even finer. Mrs. Moran painted in oil and water colors for a number of years; but she found her true artistic voice only when she took up the point



INTERIOR OF FISH-HOUSE. (CHARLES PLATT.)

some three years ago. She has always etched direct from nature, usually finishing her plates to the very last stroke in presence of the chosen scene, and completing them with bitings as few and as vigorous as possible. In the "Twilight" she has made an extensive but well-calculated use of the roulette to produce effects of tone. Her methods are not so exquisitely frank and simple as those of Mr. Gifford, and she seeks more for "pictorial" results than he. For this reason her work is, perhaps, more popular than his. But this reason does not make it less praiseworthy. Their chief plates might well be put side by side to show how the art can vary while remaining at the same level of artistic excellence.

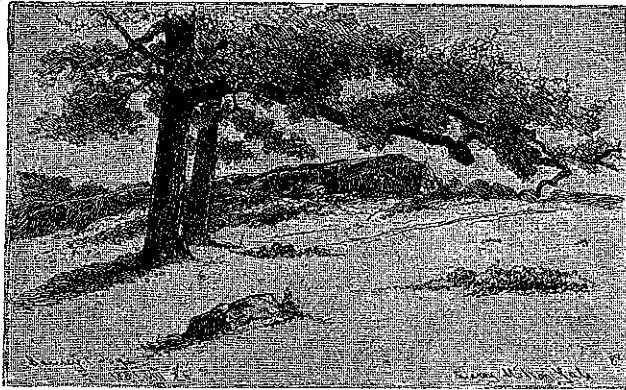
Mrs. Moran's immediate success with the needle was doubtless owing to the fact that she was her husband's pupil. Mr. Thomas Moran had etched for many years before the art became so popular as now, and has experimented in a score of ways, even with the little-practiced art of etching on glass. His plates are very various in character, but to me his best results are those of delicacy and refinement and grace, rather than those of force. His sea-shore sketches are especially attractive. If there is a fault to be found with his work—which, by the way, has won him hearty praise from Mr. Ruskin, who is not a lover of the art in general—it will be that his compositions sometimes lack unity of conception and consequently of effect,—an excellence that is strongly characteristic of the other names just mentioned.

Mr. Peter Moran has also been a prolific etcher. Animal life chiefly attracts him, and

a large plate called "The Return of the Herd," may possibly be called his best. He and his brother have both been fortunate in finding unhackneyed themes in the picturesque regions of the Yellowstone and of Spanish New Mexico.

Mr. Stephen Parrish, whom I should put with Mr. Gifford and Mr. Farrer and Mrs. Moran in the very first rank of our home-keeping etchers, and who is the most popular of them all, has tried his hand at themes of many sorts, but his name is especially associated with sea-board scenes. Our ragged fisher-villages, with their rocky foundations and primitive vessels, have found in him a first and most clear-voiced interpreter. He has experimented widely with his art, especially in the matter of sky-treatment. Those plates in which he has left the largest amount of almost untouched paper to play its part seem to me the most thoroughly successful. Unlike his associates just mentioned, Mr. Parrish does not believe in etching direct from nature, but thinks the peculiar requirements of his art may be better met if pencil sketches are leisurely adapted to the use of point and acid. He usually etches without stopping out, and sometimes altogether in the bath.

Mr. Joseph Pennell's work was hardly known, I think, until a couple of years ago, but secured him at once a place among the foremost. He too has struck out an original line for himself in his sketches of old Philadelphia, with its diversities of level and unexpected flights of steps, its quaint architectural forms, and its narrow streets and



BARNEY'S JOY. (LEROY MILTON YALE.)

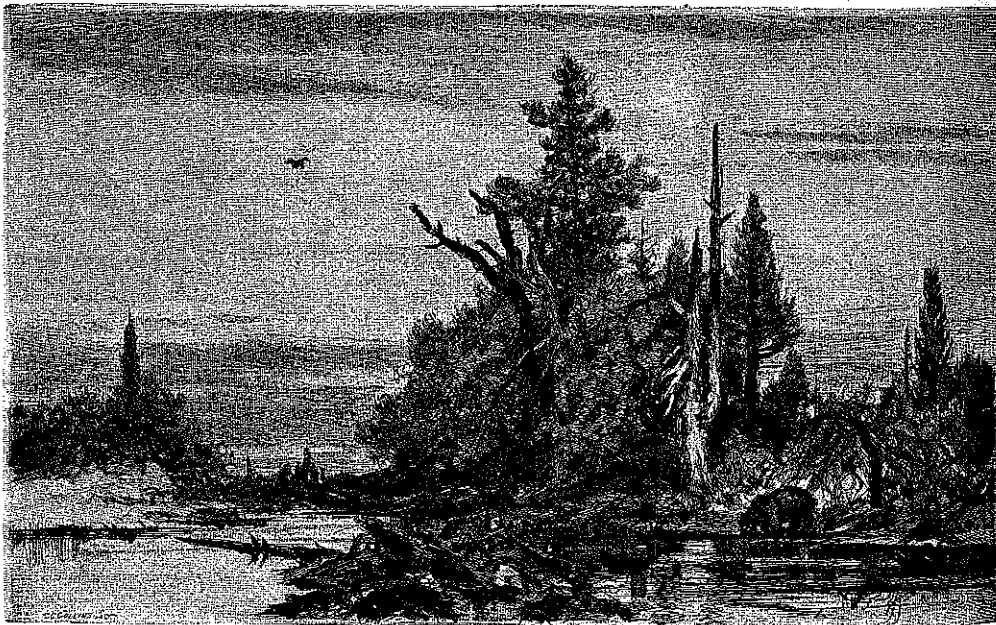
curious court-yard so rich in effects of light and shade.* During the last few months he has treated with success similar themes found in lower Louisiana. Mr. Pennell writes me: "I should be most happy to tell you about my 'usual method of working'—but I haven't any. I either work from dark to light, or in the bath, or make the whole drawing in the old-fashioned way and use stopping-out varnish. In fact all my work thus far has merely been a series of experiments * * *

* In an article called "From Cape Ann to Marblehead," published in this magazine in November, 1881, will be found wood-cuts after Mr. Parrish's best plates, while Mr. Pennell's work is similarly reproduced in "A Ramble in Old Philadelphia," in the number for March, 1882.

of my plates (in fact all, so far as I remember) have been done in a day—and most of them in half of one. About half were done out of doors and the rest from sketches. In future I intend to do everything from nature direct on the plate."

Mr. Charles A. Platt is a very young man, and just beginning, with energy and serious effort, his work in etching. He seems to have been influenced a good deal by Mr. Parrish, both in his choice of theme and in his manner of working. But his taste is artistic, his individuality is visible, and his master is a good one; so we may hope the three facts will work together till the former predominate in an art of first-rate quality.

Mr. Vanderhoof has done but few plates,



SOLITUDE. (CHARLES A. VANDERHOOF.)

in the preparation of which he has used the dry point very freely. They are all individual and poetic in sentiment and charming in workmanship. The one here reproduced is, so far as I know, the largest and most important he has published.

Mr. Nicoll is another artist worthy of all attention; and Mr. Falconer, the earliest of all our present etchers, has done a great deal of work of various sorts and qualities, from the most painstaking to the most sketchy sort,—the best being in clever renderings of time-worn and curious buildings.

Dr. Yale's name will not be found among those of our professional artists. Etching has been his recreation only, not even a minor branch of his main activity. But he deserves the name of artist none the less, and he is entitled to peculiar honor for the reason that, though standing outside the actual artistic guild, he was one of the most earnest founders and fosterers of the New York Etching Club.

Mr. Coleman, Mr. Bellows, Mr. George H. Smillie, Mr. Miller, and Mr. Kruseman Van Elten; Mr. Harry Chase, Mr. Laffan, Mr. McCutcheon, Mr. Sabin, Mr. Kimball, and Mr. Garrett—these are all men, of the elder or the younger generation, who have done interesting things, but whom the lack of space must deprive of further comment. Mrs. Greatorex has also produced many good plates, though rather in the spirit of the pen-and-ink draughtsman than of the etcher properly so-called. Still, her records of old New York are artistically as well as historically valuable.

As yet I have spoken only of our landscape etchers, and they form, indeed, a great majority among our workmen. But there are a few who have succeeded with other themes. Chief among these is Mr. F. S. Church, an artist who is so popular, and whose work has been so thoroughly discussed in Europe as well as here at home, that neither my description nor my praise is needed. His fantastic, graceful imagination is unique in our art, and works as well through the medium of point and acid as in other ways. The little cut here given does not show him in his most characteristic mood; but that mood is so familiar to every eye that perhaps a novelty was better chosen.*

Mr. John Ames Mitchell began life as an architect and has done some good etched work with architectural motives. He studied with Brunêt-Debaines, one of the best French



THE ROSE OF PAIN. (F. S. CHURCH.)

etchers of our day, and learned from him a delicacy and refinement in the management of his tools which stood him in good stead in several series of small figure-subjects published a while ago in Paris. He is especially clever, if at times a bit theatrical, in his management of strong floods of light, and has an expressive touch when drawing one of his comically characteristic little faces.

Mr. Dielman's name should not be forgotten in this connection, nor that of Mr. Gaugengigl, who, though a German by birth and education, had never etched till he came to this country.

Mr. Blum shows only two or three plates as his work thus far; but the one here reproduced is among the most ambitious and dashing things we have yet accomplished. It is strongly sketched on zinc, and the

* For a full and most appreciative notice of Mr. Church's work, the reader is referred to an article by Mr. Comyns Carr in "L'Art" for November 13th and December 4th, 1881.



LOUIS AGASSIZ. (ANNA LEA MERRITT.)

elaborate tonality is secured, as has been said, by a somewhat lavish use of artificial printing. The biting was done in a rough-and-ready way, which may be noted to show how many odd devices an etcher can employ. The whole plate was bitten once, and then the acid was poured on certain spots and wiped off when its purpose was accomplished. Naturally, no delicate gradations could be secured in such a way, but for Mr. Blum's purpose it has answered well enough.

Mr. Chase, too, has as yet done little with the needle, but enough to prove him possessed of abilities that would repay further exercise. Quite rightly he does not carry his methods with the brush into his practice with the point. His plate after his own picture called "The Jester," is not a "reproductive" etching, but an etcher's free version of a theme he had quite differently put on canvas. The face, for example, is not carefully modeled so as to duplicate the effect of the painting, but is cleverly and quickly touched with an etcher's characteristic lines and dots.

And thus I come at last to say a brief word about reproductive etching. It is a quite distinct branch of the art, though, as always, we may find many good works occupying a middle ground between two logical extremes. As so very widely practiced by modern engravers it was unknown in earlier days. Etching was long used as an auxiliary

in other kinds of engraving, but has only lately grown to its full proportions as an independent reproductive craft, its development being due to the decline of the great art of line-engraving, and to that newly born taste which demands color and tone and the preservation of a painter's technical method in a black-and-white reproduction of any sort. These things can all be secured to a quite wonderful degree in etching, but only at a sacrifice of some qualities we prize most highly in original work. The engraver-etcher's methods are very delicate, very subtle, very artistic, but almost always very slow and, of necessity, very complicated. So he lacks not only the individuality but the spontaneity and the swiftness of the artist, who is called—to mark him off from these engravers with the needle—the *painter-etcher*. Thus, while employing the same technical processes, the reproductive etcher uses them with such different aims that his art is quite another thing from that of Mr. Haden, for example. For has not Mr. Haden said that an etching which is finished in one sitting is likely to be the best? Each art is right and good in its own place. It is only when the spheres of the two have been confused in the same work, when the etcher has not been clear as to his aims and consistent in his methods, that we may call either aims or methods illegitimate.

It is curious to reflect—when we remember the wonderful interpretative skill of our wood-engravers, and also how American art has always been taunted with its lack of originality—that our etched work is almost exclusively "painter's etching," that only a few of our men have attempted reproductive work, and that even these have shown little love for its more tedious if completer methods. Among these few, however, are some who must not go unmentioned. It would have been better, perhaps, to speak of Mrs. Merritt among original workmen. Her plates are chiefly portraits, done from painted or photographic originals, often from her own pictures, but, though quite elaborate in workmanship, are not exactly to be called "reproductive" etchings. Whenever she finds her theme, she treats it in a somewhat interpretative way. Her work is essentially English in flavor, delicate and artistic, but not over strong in handling. The portrait of Sir Gilbert Scott, after a painting by George Richmond, R. A., (published in the late Review) is to my thinking the best she has accomplished.

Mr. James Smillie has done good original work, but more often clever reproductions. Among the best are versions of pictures by Charles Jacque and Bridgeman. Mr. Stephen

Ferris, too, has not confined himself to reproductions (having done among other original things some clever little portraits), but has won most of his reputation by their means. Mr. Peter Moran has also done reproductive work, and Mr. Thomas Moran's very large plate, after the Turner in his possession, is the most ambitious and also the most successful reproductive etching yet attempted in America. While acknowledging that we have no names to put into even remote comparison with the great French and German engraver-etchers of our day, we should not at all regret that our men show more inclination toward original, free, creative work.

M. G. van Rensselaer.



OUR WOOD IN WINTER.

THE circle of the wind-swept ground
Was paved with beechen leaves around,
Like Nero's golden house in Rome;
While here and there in solemn lines
The dark pilasters of the pines
Bore up the high wood's somber dome;
Between their shafts, like tapestry flung,
A soft blue vapor fell and hung.

We paused with wonder-taken breath:
It seemed a spot where frost and death
Themselves were chained at nature's feet;
And in the glow of youth and love,—
The colored floor, the lights above,—
Our hearts, refreshed, with rapture beat;
The beauty thrilled us through and through
And closer to your side I drew.

Ah, tell me when we both are old,
On dismal evenings bleak and cold,
When not a spark is in the west,
When love, aweary grown and faint,
Scarce stirs the echo of complaint
Within the sad and laboring breast,—
Ah! tell me then, how once we stood
Transfigured in the gleaming wood.

And in a vision I shall turn
To see the fallen beech-leaves burn
Reflected in your lifted eyes,
And so for one brief moment gain
The power to cast aside my pain,
And taste once more what time denies;
Nor linger till the dream has fled,
But on your shoulder sink my head.

Edmund W. Gosse.