

ETCHING AND PAINTER-ETCHING

BY JAMES D. SMILLIE.

With original Illustrations by Members of the New York Etching Club.



*From an etching by
Samuel Colman.*

JAPANESE INRO AND NETSUKE.

STRICTLY speaking, the term etching may be applied to any process where there is corrosion of metal by the use of acids. It has been practised since early in the sixteenth century. Generations of professional engravers have taught to succeeding generations methods of work that, being carefully observed, have resulted in conventionalizing the art until all spontaneity and individuality have gone out of it. There has been developed wonderful skill in cutting delicate lines with a regularity and precision that could be rivalled only by an intelligent machine. Progress in this direction could not go on forever. Its very perfection was at last an objection to it. "Faultily faultless," it became cold and uninteresting. Looking at it one sighed for some evidence of freedom from the trammels of teaching, for some exhibition of a spirit that could not be restricted by rule, for some show of dash and impetuosity that, like an epigrammatic wit, insisted upon saying what had

to be said in the shortest and most direct manner possible.

Then the painter etched, and he etched in the spirit of the painter. He ignored all the traditions so religiously observed by the professional engraver or etcher.

Spirit, freedom, and suggestiveness are the qualities loved and cultivated by the painter, and almost unknown, unfortunately, to most conventional etchers or engravers. To the mass of people, no doubt, painter-etching must seem to want something in the way of completeness or finish, and from them comes the demand for a result that is more like a picture; that is, something having tone-effects, soft, blending gradations



From an etching by Edwin Abbey.

WITH DAINTY STEPS.

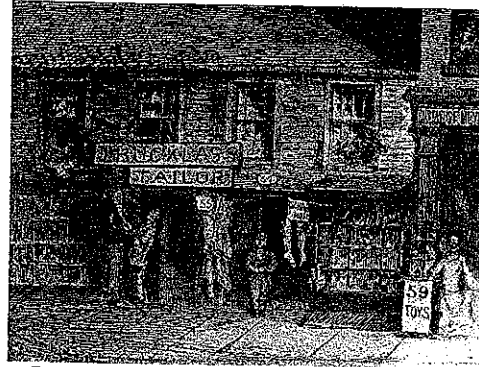
of tint and careful manipulation. The public is accustomed to getting what it demands, and in this case its requirements have not passed unheeded.

Twelve or fifteen years ago etching was presented to our public as a novelty—not a *new* novelty, but an old novelty, all the better for having been several times renewed since it was a novelty for the first time. The New York Etching



From an etching by
Carlton T. Chapman.
STREET IN ST. MALO.

a free individual and painter-like manner of drawing lines and producing results. This charm, in the nature of things as they exist, is beyond the view of the general public. As has been already said, a little more "finish" was demanded, and ever a little more, and in answer more and more of what was considered finish



From an etching by J. M. Falconer.

WHERE IRVING'S "SALMAGUNDI" WAS PUBLISHED.

Club was one of the first, if not the first, of the organizations of its kind in the field, and was mainly instrumental in developing the early stages of what soon proved to be a veritable etching craze. The first club exhibitions were very interesting, showing serious work in the effort to give expression through an unfamiliar form of art speech. Very little of the work showed technical knowledge; in most cases, it might be said, that it was better for the want of it. One charm of the work of the painter-etcher is that it is, you may say, unsophisticated; in place of technical nicety, there is

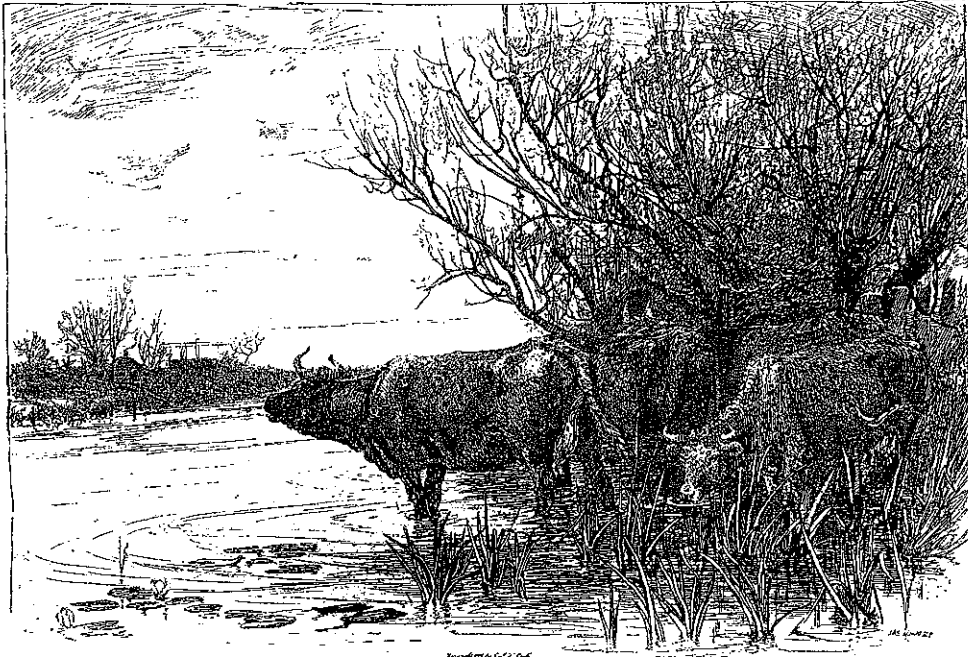


From an etching by
Thomas W. Wood.
THIS WORLD IS ALL AWRY.



From an etching by J. C. Nicoll.

MAKING FOR HARBOR.



From an etching by J. A. S. Monks.

THE MORNING CALL.

was given, and in generous recognition of the power that pays the bills the area as well as the finish was increased until, very soon, the matter of size might be described



From an etching by Joseph Lauber.

STARTING FOR WORK.

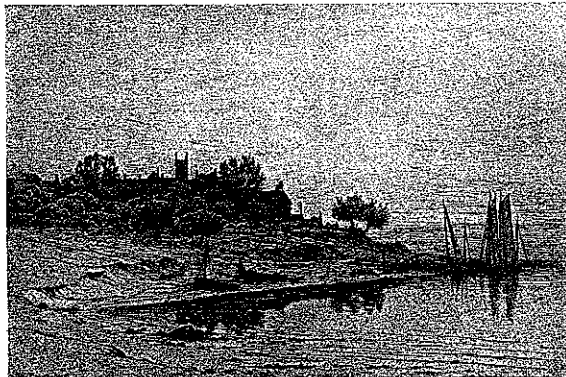


From an etching by Walter S. Lathrop.

THE PATH THROUGH THE FIELDS.

not as area, but as acreage. Print publishers seemed to spring into existence, keenest competition developed a vast business, and "etchings" of every size, shape, and color flooded the land. It was a veritable effervescence and soon subsided. The result was disheartening to many. It looked like a disappearance, but in the bottom of the measure the aqua-vitæ still remained. The froth only, the result of unnatural conditions, had been blown off. The club was not dismayed, and is to-day more firmly established than ever in pure love for its art, undefiled by commercial contaminations.

Better etchings, in the best sense of the word, are now produced here than ever before. They are not done to meet a business demand, but in answer to a desire to give expression to some ideas through a pictorial art medium most suitable to them. Some of the young students in our art schools have recently taken hold of etching with enthusiasm, a fact full of promise for the future.



From an etching by Henry Farrer.

ALONG SHORE.



From an etching by

Carlton T. Chapman.

STREET IN CHARTRES.