

## LECTURE IV.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

NOTWITHSTANDING that engraving on various metals had long been practised, the earliest mode of printing on paper, was from the surfaces of engraven blocks or tablets of wood. Guttenberg of Mentz, or Faust of Strasbourg, first promulgated this art about the year 1440, or between that time and 1450; and their respective partizans, have contended for annexing a degree of celebrity to their names, to which, as inventors, neither of them is fairly entitled. Extremely rude outlines of saints and legendary tales had previously been engraven, apparently with the view of exciting the attention of the vulgar, and had been a mode, (which no person at the time thought of turning to better account) of disseminating monkish superstition. Of these, some few collected in Germany, are preserved in the curious and valuable libraries

of Lord Spencer and Mr. Douce, to some of which, the names and legends of the Saints, &c. are added for the better information of the unlearned spectator: and it seems more than probable that these alphabetic additions, which are in the old German black letter, gave the first idea to Guttemberg, Faust, or Koster, of printing books; for precisely in this way, and not from moveable types, were books originally engraven and printed; and I believe they are so printed in China, to this day.

One of the earliest of Koster's books that I have seen, is of this kind, and contains a much larger portion of picture (if so it might be called) than of reading. It is in the Cracherode collection, which is now open to the public, and consists of sixteen leaves, each containing two subjects illustrative of Solomon's song: It is printed only on one side of the paper; shadowing with a single course of lines is feebly attempted, and under each print is a Latin scroll or label, cut in German text, on the same block. But there is a somewhat older book

in the Bodleian library, and another in the the bibliographical collection of my Lord Spencer, of which the subject is the Apocalypse, and where colour is clumsily added with the hair pencil, though without any attempt at gradation of light, much in the manner of old playing cards.

The Baron Heinnekin with great probability, thinks that the painters of the playing-cards, were really the first European printers; that they devised the method of cutting the kings, queens, &c. upon wood, to save the trouble of making a separate drawing for each card; and that they also cut the single prints of religious subjects, I have just mentioned, of which he found one of a folio size, and dated so early as the year 1423, pasted into a book, in the library of a convent at Buxheim near Memmingen.

This curious print, supposed to be the oldest extant, having been lately purchased by Lord Spencer, is now on its way to England, and will very soon find its proper

place in his valuable\* collection: meanwhile the noble Earl has kindly enabled me to shew you a fac-simile of this ancient Print, which was cut a few years ago, and has also allowed me to remove from his library a still greater curiosity for your inspection. It is one of the original blocks which was used in the very infancy of Printing, before moveable types were invented, and before shadowing was even feebly indicated. Of the history and visions of St. John the Divine, no fewer than six editions were thus engraven and printed, at this early period, and the impressions from the block I have now the honour to exhibit, constituted according to Baron Heinnekin, the second leaf of the second edition, of which there is a copy in the Royal Library at Buckingham-house: It is probably therefore, one of the earliest engravings on wood that were ever performed, and perhaps the oldest that is now extant.

Hence it appears that the art of engrav-

---

\* It has since been received, and is now in the library at Spencer-house.

ing on wood, was the parent of that of printing from the surface, and with the letter-press. To the art of printing with the rolling-press, or of delivering ink from the incisions of the graver, it has in like manner, been disputed among the learned—or rather among the curious, whether Italy or Germany, and whether accident or design, had the honour of giving birth.

Italy rests her pretensions on the following circumstances recorded by Vasari. It is known to be common with those who engrave ornaments on plate, occasionally to rub a little charcoal, or oil, or both, into their work, for the purpose of seeing the better what they are about. In the year 1460, Maso or Thomaso Finiguerra, a goldsmith of Florence, chanced to cast or let fall a piece of engraving thus filled with this sort of ink, into melted sulphur; and observing that the exact impression of his work was left on the sulphur, repeated the experiment on moistened paper, rolling it gently with a roller. It was attended with success, and Finiguerra, imparting his dis-

covery to Baccio Baldini of the same place and profession, it was by him communicated to Sandro Boticelli, and perhaps also to Antonio Pollajuoli, and Andrea Mantegna.

At this time the intercourse between Italy and Germany, was much less frequent and considerable, than it soon afterward became ; and Mr. Strutt has on the other hand produced a German print from the collection of the late Dr. Monro, of which the date is 1461, and says we have several other engravings by the same master, and that the impressions are so neatly taken from the plates, that they could not be done much better even at present, whence he concludes that they were not the first specimens of copper-plate printing.

The print which is reputed to be the oldest in the Cracherode collection, is evidently by the same engraver as this of Dr. Monro, and appears too highly finished and and too well printed, to be really one of the first : The same collection contains

however, another print from a copper or silver plate, which I should suppose to be of a still earlier date: It is in a very inferior style, full of contradictions in the perspective, and error in the drawing of the figures; and the angularity, meagreness, and painful attention to minutiae, that characterise the productions of the early German artists, are excessive.

Its subject is Augustus and the Sybil, and the Emperor's diadem, (which is elaborately wrought) as well as the profusion of finery about his dress, seem to point toward the goldsmith's shop, as its origin.

Mr. Strutt, after pursuing his inquiry into the priority of the German or Italian pretensions, to some length, brings forward an impression from an *English* plate in his own possession, which he thinks "may claim the palm of early date:" this claim, however, he afterward rather withdraws than enforces, and in conclusion, has shewn his regard for veracity, by quitting the subject without venturing a step further than his

data would safely carry him, and without deciding on the superior antiquity of Italian or German printing.

A knowledge of the era and of the author of a great work or an useful invention, is certainly desirable: Beside that it is necessary to the truth of History, it seems to assist us in indulging the amiable sentiment of Gratitude. It would call forth our sincere regret, if the name of the author of *Paradise Lost*, or the *Cartoons*, or *Principia*, had sunk in oblivion.—But, at the time which we are considering, paper and ink were in constant and daily use; and impressions from dies and from seals had for ages been taken, and were under hourly observation: wherefore it required no protracted train of thought; no long connected chain of causes and effects; no mighty genius, like that of Homer, Michael Angelo, or Newton, to perceive that impressions might also be taken either from the surfaces or incisions of engraved blocks or plates.

The Art of Printing, as I conceive, origi-



nated in a concurrence of circumstances entirely independent of the minds or studies of its reputed inventors: We have seen that at first, when it was coarsely performed, and, like the tops of ballads and the dying speeches of criminals at present, grossly addressed itself to the lower classes of the community, it was regarded as of very little consequence; and though Koster, Guttemberg, and Faust and his coadjutor, cannot be ranked in the class of inventors, I am ready to allow them the inferior merit of perceiving that the Arts of Engraving and Printing might be applied to purposes of greater magnitude and importance than had hitherto been observed. It is the important consequences *gradually resulting from* the discovery, that have made us attach a degree of credit to the name, and entertain an unmerited respect for the supposed researches, of the discoverer, to which in point of real ingenuity, the maker of the first pair of spectacles\* or stockings, would be far more justly entitled.

---

\* Of this great contributor to the enjoyments of old age and benefactor to imperfect vision, Lord Kaimes has fa-

The process of Printing is indeed so simple in itself, and was so nearly obvious in the state of things we have just attended to, that a child at play, who wanted to multiply a given form, might almost be ashamed not to have perceived it: and we ought rather to wonder it was not discovered sooner, than that it was discovered so soon: Hence some have suspected that it was known and concealed by those who might think themselves interested in preventing the diffusion of knowledge; and if the former arbiters of Europe, could be believed to have been *Bonapartes*, we might have given ample credit to the surmise:

Printing was not however promulgated till toward the middle of the fifteenth century, and the day of its promulgation was certainly a day of unparalleled importance to Europe. Of that auspicious and me-

---

voured us with the name and country. He says "Spectacles for assisting the sight were invented by Alexander Spina, a Monk of Pisa, about the end of the thirteenth century." Sketches of Man. 5. Sect. 1.

morable day, and of this immortal Art, considered in their consequences, it would be difficult to think or to speak too highly. They have frequently been the favourite theme of panegyric with the Poet\* and the Patriot, and should be for ever consecrate in the annals of mankind. The sublime station that Archimedes wished for in vain, seemed then spontaneously to emerge to notice; and then was constructed the immense lever, by means of which the whole civilised world may be moved by a single hand!—Empowered by this invention, the Professor of the imitative Arts, may disseminate every truth and every pleasure, that sight and imagination operating upon Nature, can extract or convey; the Philosopher may dispel the clouds of ignorance and error, and diffuse the light of science; the Poet may paint the charms of religion and morality to an admiring world,

---

\* Since this Lecture was first delivered, they have been the subject of a Poem of very considerable merit, by Mr. J. M'Creery, to whose care I have consigned the printing of this volume.

and the most obscure individual, if he possess the talents and the virtue, may expose the errors and the vices, while he braves the indignation, even of the most powerful and opulent. Hence an unshackled press—a sacred right which in this country is *peculiarly* enjoyed, has in all free states been esteemed the great test, bulwark, and palladium, of Liberty and Truth.

In tracing effects to their true causes, it ought not to be forgotten that the great benefits we have derived, and continue to derive, from Engraving and Printing, ought in fairness, to be partly ascribed to the discovery of the means of converting rags into paper: this probably *helped to suggest the idea* of Printing, and perhaps two centuries and a half had scarcely more than brought this invention to the degree of perfection necessary for the reception of impressions from types and engravings. Had the modern art of making paper been known to the ancients, we had probably never heard the names of Faust and Finiguerra, for with

the same kind of stamps which the Roman tradesmen used for their pottery and packages, books might also have been printed; and the same engraving which adorned the shields and pateras of the more remote ages, with the addition of paper, might have spread the rays of Greek and Etrurian intelligence, over the world of antiquity.

Of the truth of this assertion, I have the satisfaction to lay before you the most decided proofs, by exhibiting engraved Latin inscriptions both in cameo and in intaglio, from the collection of Mr. Douce,\* with impressions taken from them at Mr. Savage's letter-press, but yesterday; and also a print, taken with permission, from a Greek, Phrygian, or Etruscan patera, in the Hamiltonian collection: the latter is a mere outline in a bad style of two figures in the Phrygian dress, and though it possesses no *merit*

---

\* One of these is an intaglio stamp engraved on stone, with which a Roman oculist was used to mark his medicines, the other, which is of metal, and in cameo, is simply the proper name of the (Roman) tradesman by whom it has probably been used, "Titus Valagini Mauri."

whatever, it serves to shew how little was wanting to the ancients, of the modern art of printing from the incisions of the graver, and may be thought a curiosity, as being in all probability the oldest engraving in the world, from which an impression has been taken on paper.

The British Museum contains moreover, two other ancient engravings, performed exactly in the same manner as we now engrave on copper for printing, of which one—the remains of a Greek parazonium, has been copied and accurately described by Mr. Strutt: the other is also classical both in composition and subject, and is cut on a patera of bronze: Venus attended by Cupid, is represented as preferring a complaint or imploring a favour of Jupiter, and Mercury ordered on an errand, is in the act of departure—stepping through the Zodiac. As I know not that this (perhaps astronomical record) has been either copied,\* or

---

\* I have since seen that it has been copied by Raphael, in a drawing (which Marc Antonio has engraven) of four

particularly noticed, I had intended to endeavour to print it for your perusal, but on a close examination, the patera was thought to be too time-worn, and the *Erugo* too valuable; for me to venture on the attempt. †

I am under the necessity of postponing in part, what I may have to state on the subject of Wood-engraving, in consequence of certain suspicions which I could not help entertaining, and which I have not yet been able to remove, that at least some of the productions of the old masters which are generally thought to be impressions from wood, are really printed from some other material, and perhaps from the substance (whatever it may have been) that was ori-

---

subjects which appear to be taken from the *Æneid*. What had been thus noticed by Raphael, it was natural that Sir William Hamilton should desire to possess; and hence we probably owe to Raphael that this curious patera, is now in our national collection.

† In the collection of the late Mr. Townley, are a considerable number of similar pateras of bronze, some of them embossed with chasing, and all ornamented with engravings allusive to the sacrifices and other religious customs and ceremonies of the ancients.

ginally used for letter-types. It appears to me, from the freedom and frequency of the dark crossings which distinguish these works from modern wood engravings, and from this mode of working being obviously the *easiest* mode of producing the effects which their authors had in view, that they are either etchings—the lights being corroded away; or, which is yet more likely, that a prototype or matrix was cut in intaglio, probably with the graver, in which the tablets from whence the prints are taken, were cast in the manner of letter-types.

It is well known that combinations of works of Literature and Art, rude indeed, but printed *at once* and with the *letter-press*, were common from about the time of the appearance of the Nuremberg chronicle. Numerous are the books printed in the two succeeding centuries, that are embellished with letter-press vignettes, and large ornamented capitals at the beginnings of the chapters: and the question naturally occurring to a very intelligent antiquary, (to whom I have the honour of being known.)



What is become of the tablets from whence these ornaments are printed? he employed persons to search for them in those cities of Germany and the Low-countries, which had been celebrated for printing—but they sought in vain. Now had these works been of wood, some of them would probably have been found; whereas, the question of their disappearance, if they were of type-metal, is resolved by supposing that (like old letter-types) they were melted down when worn, or useless from the change of fashion, in order to cast letters with their substance. To believe them to have been of wood, we are therefore compelled to add the improbability of their entire disappearance, to the great labour and difficulty of cutting away the minute interstices between the crossed lines, so as to deliver dark crossings from their surfaces.

About the time now under our consideration, and perhaps at a still earlier period, the artists who stained and painted glass for church windows, &c. were in possession of a method which is totally lost to

the modern practitioners in that Art, of heightening their lights by means of masterly courses of bright strokes or hatchings, which they frequently crossed in various directions. Of such ancient windows I have seen many fragments, some of which display considerable judgment and dexterity of hand, and am somewhat inclined to think that the larger works of Wolgemuth, Albert Durer, and those early German masters who are generally supposed to have engraven on wood, have been accomplished by a similar process—whatever that process might have been.

It appears not improbable that both these arts, and perhaps that of Etching on copper, may have been suggested by the still more ancient ornaments corroded on the sword-blades of Persia and Syria: but, however these events may have been, I have scarcely a doubt that works of art capable of being printed, and perhaps susceptible of much more refinement than I can be at present aware of, may be thus performed on the composition that is now used for letter-

types—and if antimony had been known to the artists and letter-founders of the fifteenth century, I should have had but little hesitation in supposing modern type-metal\* to

---

\* I have to regret that this part of the Lecture is so little better than a statement of doubts. Since this volume has been in the press, I have seen a copy of Johnson's translation of Ambrose Parey's Anatomy, (printed in 1691) which is illustrated with Letter-press engravings, where dark crossings frequently occur, and in the preface to which the author says "the figures in this work are not the same used by my author; but according to those of Bauhine, which were used in the work of Dr. Crook." Upon referring to the latter work (printed 1631) it was evident that the prints were not copies, but from the very same engravings—but there was this remarkable difference, which ordinary incredulity could scarcely stand against, that in Johnson's work the prints were obviously impressed from some substance which had been *worm-eaten* in the course of the sixty years it had lain by, and which could not therefore have been *metal*. This single, simple fact, will perhaps be thought decisive against my hypothesis: It disproves that type-metal, but it does not demonstrate that wood, was used for these engravings, though it affords a strong presumption on that side the question; and my *stubborn* opinion, abandoning type-metal, may still fortify itself behind vegetable putties, or pastes that are capable of being hardened—or any substance that is capable of being *worm-eaten*.

have been the substance they employed for the purpose now under our consideration.

When I shall have satisfactorily investigated these matters, I shall be better qualified to submit my sentiments on this early and interesting branch of the Art, to your notice. At present, I shall request your more particular attention to the mode of Engraving so as to print from the incisions.

The first of the German engravers on COPPER whose works I have seen, and who is fairly entitled to be called an artist, is Martin Schön or Schoen, of Culmbach, whom Vasari, and others on his authority, have mistakenly called Martin of Antwerp.\* His prints are without dates, but as he died in 1486, and is said to have commenced his career about or soon after 1460, he probably practised this art almost from its very beginning. Francis van Stoss has been

---

\* The French writers call him *hübsé Martin*, i. e. Martin the handsome, *hübsch* or *Schön*, signifying in the German language, handsome.

mentioned as his tutor, but the chronology is not clear, and Stoss has left nothing behind to shew that he was capable of imparting any valuable information.

Martin Schön engraved from his own compositions: His plates are numerous, and shew that his mind was fertile and vigorous. If it was not *sufficiently* vigorous to burst the Gothic fetters which at that time manacled the taste of Germany, his admirers may solace themselves by doubting whether the unassisted powers of any individual whatever, would have been found adequate to so difficult an occasion. The tyranny of established custom is probably not less stern and unrelenting in the arts of design, than in those of education.

How the stiff and meagre manner—the angular draperies and emaciated forms which characterise the early productions of the Germans, came to prevail among the Gothic and Celtic nations from whom they derived them? is a curious and perhaps not an unimportant question. By comparing the

early efforts in art of all nations of which we have any memorials, we may be led to infer that man has gradually learned to see objects as they really exist in nature: The images pictured on the retina of the eye, appear to be refracted in their transmission to the intellectual retina, and in every country to continue to be so refracted, until, as the sun of Science slowly ascends, the morning density of the mental medium is gradually rarefied. It is not less observable, nor a less curious fact, that a similar haggard lankness in the attempts of man in an uncivilised state, to imitate the human form, has almost universally prevailed. The early art of Egypt, Persia, and Hindoostan, agrees in meagreness with the rude efforts of the Mexicans and South-sea islanders, and with the German art, derived from the Gothic and Celtic nations, which is now under our observation.

In the time of Martin Schön, and Albert Durer, German art was much in the same state with European ethics: Theory was separated from practice; and both Art and

Philosophy remained perplexed with false analogies, metaphysical jargon, and occult nonsense, till Bacon and the resurrection of the Antique, referred them to the results of experience, as a criterion of principle.

Under such circumstances, I presume to think that neither my Lord Orford nor any other man, should have dispraised either Schön or Albert Durer, for not having done, what no artist of any other school has of himself been able to perform: For, not only neither of these founders of the German school, but none of the early Italian masters, has shewn that he possessed the penetration to see beyond this gloomy exhalation from the barbaric ages, till the great examples of classic art began to re-appear, and reflect back on Nature the light they had received from her. If, but for this light, and the advantages he derived from contemplating the works of Michael Angelo, Raphael himself might have remained for ever more dry and more elaborately minute than Albert Durer: If the works of Durer convinced Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dufresnoy, and

Vasari, that with an Italian education he would have ranked in the first class of Artists, and if Michael Angelo saw the St. Anthony of Schön, with the delight that Vasari has reported, and even copied it with the addition of\* colour—we have the fiat of the first Judges in their favour, and should be too liberally disposed toward them, and too just to ourselves, to allow their misfortunes to be confounded with their faults.

To me it appears that the works of Schön

---

\* The reader will not however, allow more to this fact, than the measure of importance to which it is fairly entitled. In his account of Martin Schön, Strutt has the following passage: "Michael Angelo was so pleased with the print of St. Anthony carried into the air by evil spirits, that he studied from it himself; which was paying a very high compliment to the abilities of Schoen," and in another place he has added, on the authority of Vasari, that Michael Angelo copied the Print in colours, but has omitted to state (what Vasari has also mentioned, and what has but very lately come to my knowledge) that Michael Angelo was but a school-boy at the time. I mention these things for the sake of accuracy, and not as any acknowledgment of alteration in my opinion of this very remarkable Print.



evince a strong mind operating on the co-existing state of things—brooding over the abyss, from whence the future elements of his art were to be created; and using with considerable success, the materials by which it was surrounded.

It may be regarded as fortunate for his claims, that in the instance of his St. Anthony, he has adopted a subject that in its nature set him free, or nearly so, from the Gothic bondage with which on other occasions his genius was shackled: He has been the *first* boldly to venture into the regions of Chimera, and by the potency of his art, has compelled thence the Demons that Callot and Teniers were afterward solicitous to invoke and proud to employ; while the expression of undisturbed faith and pious resignation in the countenance of the Holy man whom they are hurrying into the air, shews that he saw and copied that portion of Nature which she *did* vouchsafe to unveil to him, with a clear vision and delicate though determined hand. If his Demons are more fantastic and less ter-

rible, than modern art would deem it proper to introduce, we should recollect that the age of Schön was that of Ariosto,\* and that two centuries elapsed between the grotesque monsters of Ariosto, and the sublime demonology of Milton.

It is consonant to the progressive improvement of critical observation, that more should be known of the human countenance at an early period, (or indeed at any period) than of the rest of the figure, because it is the kind of study and observation in which men are most interested. Accordingly, Schön's heads are in general by far the best parts of his performances. Those of his single figures of St. Martin and St. John, have considerable merit; the divine character and expression of that of his Christ bearing his cross, as it appears in

---

\* Ariosto was twelve years of age when Schön died. If there be any trifling error in saying that the age of Schön was that of Ariosto, the correction of that error, is in favour of the principle I am here supporting: namely, the general slow progress of the improvement of human intellect.

the good impressions, has rarely been surpassed, and several other heads in this extensive composition, possess a proportionable share of excellence. (Of this plate there are two copies, one of which is by Bartholomew Schön, the brother of Martin, and both are very inferior to the original. I mention this in passing, that persons desirous of possessing Martin Schön's, which is marked with his initials, may be careful not to mistake.)

In some of the engravings of this artist, I trace a latent feeling that his art might be rendered subservient to the expression of the various textures of substances:—Nay, *more* than this—Expression of texture strongly discovers itself in the grain of the wooden Cross; in the various modes he has invented of describing different sorts of drapery, and in the sterility of the ground: perhaps the latter is as much the result of the necessary operation of the uneducated graver, as of study—Yet, is it in such full concord with the barrenness of the scene and barbarism of the subject, as to be not un-

worthy of your favourable notice ; while the whole together seems to shew that a sentiment has subsisted from the very commencement of Engraving, that it was susceptible of this particular merit, and which may therefore be fairly presumed to be not founded in the fallacious refinements of modern fashion, (though perhaps sometimes run after with too much fashionable avidity) but one of the primary elements of the Art.

Of the ways in which an artist of Genius may enlarge the sphere of human knowledge, the discovery and practical exhibition of new resemblances, either actual or analogical, between Nature and the local energies or blandishments of his art, is one : and it is one in which Albert Durer, who studied the works of Schön, greatly distinguished himself.

I ought at the same time to observe to you, that his resemblances, for the most part, proceed too much upon fac-simile principles for the generalised dignity of

his subjects, and that his powers of imitation are too prodigally lavished upon subordinate and unessential parts.

The expression of his figure of Melancholy, which would else have approached Sublimity, is considerably injured by the introduction of a multitude of objects, most of which the mind does not readily assimilate with the sentiment of Melancholy: It must first be perceived or discovered, that these objects are allusions to Astrology, Alchemy, and the occult Sciences, as they were called:—The performance addresses itself therefore to the curious and inquisitive part of mankind, and not to Man: and as neither the eye nor the mind, can at once dilate with greatness and descend to littleness, it is evident that the research it requires, must be the destruction of Sublimity.

Though here is nothing of the “holy calm,” with which Collins has surrounded *his* figure of Melancholy, this composition may still be thought interesting on another

account—I mean as a true picture of the times in which it was engraven; for precisely thus was attention perplexed and distracted on most philosophical subjects, in the age of Albert Durer; and as he is the author of seven Treatises, most of which are on the metaphysics of Art, he had probably experienced much of that species of Melancholy which proceeds from the mental exhaustion and dissatisfaction, in which such studies often terminate: Regarded in this view, it is no inapt verification of the old adage, “The Painter paints *himself*.”

It might have assisted to reconcile us to the defects of this performance, if Albert Durer had named it Study:—Or, if we could fancy the figure out of the picture, we might be content to let our attention dwell awhile, on the skill with which he has represented most of the other objects when abstractedly and severally considered. This talent however, of representing the characters and textures of individual objects, is still more conspicuous and somewhat less objectionable, in the print of St. Jerome

*in the Room*,\* wherein all the objects are rendered with a fidelity little short of the the Camera obscura. Regarding the art as in its infancy, we may look at this engraving with the same kind of pleasure—and we should look at all the works of Art of this period, with the same candid indulgence, with which Reynolds contemplated the Virgin and Child by Van Eyck in the Cathedral church of Bruges—“the artist (says Sir Joshua) having accomplished the purpose *he* had in view.”

Albert Durer is so conspicuous a figure in the Pantheon of Engraving, that I shall think it right to conduct you round him, as if we were examining an ancient Statue; and even occasionally to change the light and shade, and throw in reflections from other objects, for the sake of obtaining a more competent knowledge of our subject.

We are not dissatisfied with our Poet Spenser, because he is not Pope: On the

---

\* So called by way of distinguishing it from another Engraving of this Saint, by the same artist.

contrary, we are rather pleased, and flattered (if I mistake not,) to find that our candour is called upon: We patiently attend to the minute detail of his lengthened processions, and we liberally grant him the free use of his whilom's, his ekes, his ayes, his eftsoons, and the whole vocabulary of his once poetical but now obsolete phraseology.

What Spenser is to Pope, the works of Albert Durer are to *the best* works of Bartolozzi, (whom till lately we could almost call our countryman,) the language of the art having since become in the same proportion, more copious and polished.—It may not therefore, be too much, to say that early works of art should be estimated with reference to the general state of art which preceded them, and the coexisting state of Art and Society—not be compared with what has appeared since, unless to answer some purpose of improvement; nor with the refined ideas of possible excellence, of the first modern artists: Newton himself, might else be thought obnoxious to censure, because he was uninformed of many facts



that are well known to the scientific gentlemen of this Institution.

I conceive it to be essential to my purpose, not to disregard either of these views, but, (as I have already intimated,) rather to aim at imparting critical information, than practical improvement: When therefore I may commend the works of a distinguished artist who lived at a distant period, I am not to be supposed to hold them up in the same degree, as objects of imitation to the students in art of the present day. But, if not his works, the energy of his mind—that power which enabled him to extend the radius of the golden compasses which heretofore circumscribed his art, is always a laudable object of emulation.

Every artist that is worthy of the appellation, desires, and endeavours by his works, that the average or general feeling of the Society to which those works address themselves, shall sympathise or accord with his own. With this view, while one is content to adopt the prevailing notions of

Beauty and Propriety, which exist in the minds of his contemporaries, and endeavour gradually to refine and raise them to the level of his own; another—warmed by a nobler enthusiasm, and perhaps of more fortunate education, dares exercise his profession for posterity, and leaving Time to toil after him, consoles himself but too often for present suffering and obscurity, with the distant hope,—the bright but ideal recompense, of posthumous Glory.

These two sets of motives however, have not always a separate existence, but mixed in various proportions and modified by circumstances, they operate as the grand stimuli to excellence in Art, and both Spenser and Durer combined them in no mean degree: they pleased and instructed their contemporaries, and events have shewn that they were not without reasonable hopes of pleasing posterity also.

Of those poets and professors of imitative art, who have seemed *far* to outstrip the taste and knowledge of their respective ages and

countries, I do not recollect any of whom we can say with certainty, that they were not greatly indebted for the superiority of their attainments, to the re-appearance of monuments of the Literature and Arts of former and more refined periods: Upon some principle of mental affinity, they have possessed a superior elective attraction for the beauty and essence of Antiquity, and by vigorously embracing the favourite daughters of Time past, have sent forth a progeny of power to anticipate and transmit the progress and the pleasures of Time to come.

When we consider that these opportunities and advantages, were nearly denied to Albert Durer as a Painter, and utterly denied to him as an Engraver, it will appear surprising how much he has accomplished: How much original talent he has shewn: How much intuitive insight into Nature; the practical energies of his\*

---

\* The difference between the professor Fuseli and myself, respecting the merits of Albert Durer and some other of the

Art, and the possible analogies between them.

There is something grateful to our feelings, in the exercise of that power which enables us to transport our minds back to the period at which Durer engraved, and Spenser wrote: The perception that the language (as well as thoughts) of the latter, was *then* highly poetical, seems to reflect a flattering warmth on the mild triumphs of those who are conscious partakers of the subsequent progress of intellectual refinement. To read and to enjoy Albert Durer requires no more than this, and will gratify our taste and discernment no less: If any one of his performances were to be pointed

---

the early Engravers, is rather apparent than real. It should be recollected that he had to speak of Durer's merits as a *Painter*, and to say how far his *example* when compared with the examples of the other old masters, was worthy of imitation by the Students in painting of the present day; I had to regard him as an *Engraver*, and to declare my opinion of the rank he ought to hold in the estimation of Collectors and Connoisseurs. It is one thing to point out what to do in an Art, and another how to appreciate what has formerly been done.

out as more particularly resembling Spenser, I think it should be the legendary tale of St. Hubert. They are characterised by the same romantic heights of extravagance; the same abundance of ideas; the same unremitting and successful attention to minute excellence; the same general air of incredibility rendered credible, and, as we should say now—if they were now produced for the first time,—the same want of concentration, brevity, and general effect; but a temporary adoption of the sympathies of the sixteenth century, as far as Art is concerned, reconciles us to these, and affords us an interest analogous to that with which we look back to the occupations of children,—reflecting the while, at once on our former and on our present selves.

Another of the most celebrated, though in my opinion, not the best, of Durer's engravings, is his Adam and Eve. He has in this instance (though I do not remark it as being a solitary instance) had recourse to Nature for his models, but his Eve is not "the fairest of her daughters," nor his

“ Adam the goodliest of men since born :”  
Yet I think we may perceive that he selected from the Nature with which he was acquainted ; and though we do not behold the symmetry and superlative grace of Greek beauty, we probably see the felt and acknowledged beauty of Nuremberg.—It will also be allowed, that the Paradise they must shortly quit, does not seem very desirable to inhabit : Here is no genial light ; no luxuriance of vegetation, and no abundance of animal life.—To use more of the words of Milton, Nature is so far from wantoning as in her prime,—so very far from playing at will her virgin fancies, that she appears (in those of Shakespear) “ bald with dry antiquity :” —Yet if Raphael has violated this cardinal principle of propriety, by erecting a church and houses two stories high, in *his* Paradise, who shall throw the first stone at Albert Durer ?—The boles of his Trees, though among the first—if not the very first that were ever engraven, have much of the truth of individual nature, and their foliage and the fur of the Cat, are expressed with a degree of freedom that must

surprize those who reflect that no Etching has been employed, and how comparatively ill calculated are the sleek and stiff lines of the unassisted graver, to the expression of such objects. The introduction of the Cat and Mouse in Paradise, could not fail to be understood, from its familiarity, but though ingenious, this very familiarity rendered it unfit for the occasion. The prophet Isaiah has far more nobly expressed the primæval harmony and happiness of the brute creation.

The Eve of Albert Durer, is apparently of the same *family* that Otho Venius and Rubens afterward adopted for their models, and in the engraving which collectors call "the Death's-head," is a female figure which still more evidently shews the esteem in which Rubens must have held the works—or at least the women, of Albert Durer.

It is not easy to conceive the occasion that could have given birth to this mysterious print of the Death's-head. It presents us either the ordinary routine of human

life, in allegory, or perhaps a sort of poetic armorial bearing: The Crest is a winged Helmet, richly ornamented, and beautifully executed; and though a scull, which one should think could not fail to be an awful monitor, is highly embossed on the shield—the female Supporter—heedless of her charge—heedless of the moral lesson, and (I am afraid) of the moral character, she has to sustain, is obviously listening to the very suspicious suggestions of a sort of savage man. It appears to be one of the Night-thoughts of Albert Durer, and perhaps, like those of Dr. Young, may be intended to mark the lamentable influence of the grosser passions.

Whatever its author may have intended to inculcate by this Print, its execution as an engraving is admirable. The Helmet, with all its pomp of Heraldic appendage, and the actual and reflex lights on its polished surface, are characteristically, though minutely, expressed; the Scull is accurately drawn, and its bony substance is described with a masterly hand—the author has even



sedulously attended to the finer enamel of its two remaining teeth. The head of the Savage, with its beard and wild redundancy of snaky tangled hair, has considerable and well managed breadth of light and shade, though its character is far less savage than should seem to belong to the rest of the figure:—Its expression is doubtless meant to be assumed and insinuating. The countenance of the Female, I presume to think has seldom been surpassed for that successful mixture of character and expression, that lends a willing ear to a delusive promise; and the hands of both figures are far better drawn than we have hitherto seen among the productions of the German school: the drapery also, which we have been accustomed to see stiff, starched, and complicated, is here relaxed into freedom and simplicity, and is so remarkable for silky texture; approaches so near to what is now termed picturesque composition of forms and light and shade, and is on the whole so superior to that of his Melancholy, and some other of his subsequent works, as leaves us, either to wonder that Albert

Durer having once attained, should ever lose sight of the excellence of its principles; or to infer that he did not perceive their excellence, or that the science he deduced from his own observation of Nature, prevailed but occasionally over the prejudices of his education.

In his small prints of the life of Christ, of which Marc Antonio is said to have pirated the copy-right, other instances occur of this style of superior simplicity in the draperies, and some of broad and captivating effects of light and shade: His Jesus Christ suffers greatly, or beams with God-like benevolence; his Magdalens and Madonas are sometimes divinely pathetic; and many other of the heads in these interesting and often grand compositions, are exquisitely finished miniatures, remarkable for that sort of accordance and consistency of parts, which we deem the internal evidence of Truth and Nature.

I must refer those who may be desirous of inspecting Albert Durer's portraits, to the

Cracherode collection: It contains those of himself; Frederick Duke of Saxony; Erasmus, and several others: all of them transcending the art of that time, and consequently the impartial expectations of *this*. In point of drawing, they possess the same internal evidence of correctness which distinguishes the best of his historical heads; in style they are laboured, but the labour is not ill bestowed; and the *chiaroscuro* is frequently comprehensive and clear.

The refined Art which is exercised in such high perfection by the best portrait painters of our own country and of the present day;—The Science which enables them, by combining in their utmost proportions the General with the Particular, to assert the dignity and maintain the dominion, of mind over matter, and of imitative Art over individual Nature, was then unfelt and unknown.—The German portraits of the latter end of the fifteenth century, can be expected to be no better than literal, fac-simile, unexalted likenesses, of the persons they would represent: They are not rendered, and not attempted to be

rendered, with the judicious abstraction of a wise magistrate selecting the essential points of the case before him, and anticipating your verdict, while he seems to submit evidence;—but rather with the anxiety and painful particularity of a witness at the Bar, who is sworn to tell the *whole Truth*, and *nothing but* the Truth: and it may be said in favour of Albert Durer, that he does not, like his competitors, appear to suffer from the recollection of his oath, but delivers what he has seen, with manly firmness and fidelity—without tormenting his memory for more, or seeming to have distressed his recollection for so much.

Otho Venius, the instructor of Rubens, appears to have studied the best both of Durer's historical heads, and his draperies, with advantage, and to have occasionally assisted the composition of his pictures with selections from the life of Christ, and such of the set of Apostles as I conceive Durer engraved after his return from Venice: and all succeeding engravers who have studied the works of Albert Durer,

have reaped equal advantage from observing the happy adaptation and various mixtures, of lines and stippling, which he has employed in representing the rugged or polished, hard or soft, flat, curved, or broken surfaces, of the various objects he intended to express.

We are now arrived at the period at which *Etching* began to be rudely practised. I incline to think—but am not certain, that Albert Durer was the first man who corroded a plate with aquafortis, so as to be printed with the rolling-press: *If* he was, no man on the whole, has been a greater benefactor to the art now under our consideration.

Evelyn is mistaken in dating this important invention from the *middle* of the sixteenth century: The earliest of Durer's prints, that is evidently the offspring of aquafortis, and impressed from the corroded lines, is dated 1516; and in two years after, appeared his more celebrated Etching of the march of an army, which has been called

“The Cannon,” from a piece of ordnance forming the principal object on the foreground. Both these etchings are reported to have been performed on plates of iron or steel.

His Etchings are far more free and fearless than might have been expected from first attempts in a new Art, and from the anxious precision and incessant attention to the minutiae, with which he laboured his engravings. He seems to have considered Etching, when compared with Engraving, as of minor importance—as a sort of plaything, and in aiming at less, has in some respects, really accomplished more than he could possibly have done with his graver: but he appears to have *bit in* or corroded his plate all at once, and not to have thought of producing gradation of shade, either by partial stoppings out, or the increased pressure of his Etching-needle. Neither does he seem to have conceived the idea of afterward improving either the polish of such objects as might require it, or the *chiaroscuro* of his etchings, by means of

the graver. Hence, there is nothing to assist us in supposing the distance recedes from the foreground, but the diminution of the sizes of his objects—hence also what is meant for sky, is without air: but the cannon itself with its carriage, the stony ground, and the winding of the road through the middle ground, are not ill expressed, and the village and distant country, are drawn with a masterly hand.

Lucas van Leyden blended more than the faults with less than the merits of his friend Albert Durer. He has the same redundancy of stiff angular drapery; the same want of advertence to the figures it should cover; the same vulgar choice of forms, and more than the same general Gothic gusto, which distinguish the worst of Durer's performances, without his copiousness of invention, his occasional vigour, or his accurate observation of individual nature.— Yet, is he in some instances so superior to himself, that if I had seen no other of the works of Lucas than early impressions of his David with the head of Goliah, or David

playing before Saul, I should have thought myself warranted in endeavouring to vindicate Lucas van Leyden, from the aspersions of him who should thus traduce his reputation.

I have passed over Francis van Stoss, Michael Wolgemuth, Jacob Walsh, and Israel van Mecheln, because their works afforded nothing elementary—nothing that could lead us to a gradual acquaintance with the essentials of the art: Scarcely a single ray of Taste or Intelligence beams athwart the Gothic gloom, in which their German patience is enveloped. I shall (not for the same reason, but for reasons allied to it) pass lightly for the present, over the performances of the immediate successors, and for the most part, imitators, of Albert Durer, —generally reckoned among those whom the French, from the smallness of their productions, have termed the *little* masters.—Aldegrever, Altdorfer, Penz, and the Behams made no new discoveries, but they occasionally improved upon Durer, by contemplating, and incorporating with their styles,



the superior drawing of the schools of Florence and Rome; in which respect Aldegrever and Penz, who studied for a time under Marc Antonio, excelled their competitors.

I do not propose any thing *quite* so tedious, as to conduct you step by step through the unprofitable wanderings of an Art, that has long travelled without roads, without indices, and without light, but rather to select such prints for your observation, and submit such observations to your notice, as may enable us to ascertain its track, and perhaps mark its actual progress by a few simple lines.—I shall therefore conclude for the present, with a brief summary of the journey we have made to-day.

The progress of the art of producing engraved prints on paper, has been from wood-engraving, which commenced with a mere rude outline, of which my Lord Spencer's tablet is a curious specimen, and was followed by attempts at shadowing—at first

It may perhaps  
be pointed out that  
presented as they  
have been, and  
the pleasure of  
the new fragment  
understand; and  
we shall and how  
regardless of a  
attention.

by a single course of lines, or hatchings. Wolgemuth, the preceptor of Albert Durer, soon discovered the means of crossing this first course of lines in the deeper shadows, with a second, and sometimes with a third course, so as in the hands of Albert Durer himself, to imitate spirited pen and ink drawings, with great success. This art of delivering dark crossings from the surface, is lost to the modern Engravers, or at least cannot be performed on wood without occupying so much time and requiring so much care, as would far exceed the advantage.

Engraving on copper, and printing from the incisions, did not grow out of this branch of the Art, but from such ornamental engraving as had long been practised by the monks of the middle ages, and more recently by the goldsmiths, combined with the discovery of the rolling-press. But its superior powers and obvious susceptibility of refinement, had in some degree supplanted the former Art, even before the invention or discovery of *Etching* so as to print with the rolling-press.

Etching afforded a means analogous to the objects themselves, of drawing and describing all those objects of which wildness and freedom communicated by spontaneous perception and feeling, is the Soul; yet from the prevalence of those habits and prejudices of education which have been already noticed; which hang like dark veils about the faculties of man; which have been called second nature, but which are perhaps more properly first nature; the extent and variety of its energies, were not perceived for a considerable time, if they be even yet perceived: The *means* of engraving, or the manual operation of the graver, was mistaken for the end; and hence a false criterion of merit obtained considerable influence, and to the great hindrance of the improvement of the Art, long continued to maintain it. Connoisseurs gravely put on their critical spectacles, in order to see in what degree, and how dexterously, the etcher had imitated the clear and clean-cut lines of the graver; just as the first printers merely endeavoured to imitate MS missals, without perceiving the

superior degree of perfection of which printing was susceptible ; or as (by a similiar misapprehension) some persons have lately attended the theatre, not for the moral of the Drama, nor the merits of the Poet—not to compare the efforts of the performers with their own ideas of nature and propriety ; but for the mere purpose of seeing how far the irregular freedom and spontaneous sallies—the wild varieties of one representative of King Richard or Hamlet, imitated, or deviated from, the undeviating and inimitable precision of another.

About the close of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, a new mode of engraving, of which I have reserved the notice—or rather a combination of the two modes I have already mentioned, made its appearance, and Mair, the disciple of Martin Schön, may contest with Hugo da Carpi, the Italian painter, the merits of having been the first to combine in the same performance, both modes of engraving and printing, and of having invented that process which successfully imitates drawings washed with

bistre or Indian ink, and to which the title of engraving in *chiaroscuro*, was at that time *exclusively* and *therefore* improperly applied. Having slightly engraved his proposed subject on copper, marking only the outlines and deeper shadows, Mair printed it from the incisions: he then prepared a block or tablet of wood, upon which he carved out the extreme or high lights, and then impressed ink or colour from its surface, upon the former print, taking care to secure the coincidence of the plate and block, in the printing, by a mechanical contrivance. By these means, a middle-tint, which was frequently of brown, was apparently washed over a pen and ink drawing, and the extreme lights appeared as if heightened with white paint or crayon. Very good imitations of Painters sketches and cartoons were thus produced, and Hugo da Carpi, by means of an additional block and more competent powers of drawing, was enabled to add another tint, and to produce those bold imitations of the sketches of the Italian painters (particularly those of Raphael) which have gained him a more

extensive and lasting reputation, than the best of his original pictures.

Respecting one of his pictures, there is a short story upon record, which it may be worth digressing to repeat. In his zeal to display extraordinary powers, or to obtain extraordinary praise, Da Carpi took it into his head to reject his pencils, and to paint an Altar-piece, in which he laid on the colours *immediately* with his fingers. The picture being brought to Michael Angelo, and his opinion importunately requested, he simply observed that "it would have been better had he used his pencils." From this mild but forcible reproof of Michael Angelo, the admirers of prints imitated in needle-work, and other similar exhibitions, where Folly has created difficulty in the affectation of displaying Art, may extract a salutary lesson.

I believe that certain lincn-drapery and paper-hangings, are now printed nearly in the same way with the engravings of Mair and Da Carpi. By the same process and

by other processes, more recent but not more ingenious, very plausible imitations of painters' sketches, and sometimes of the sketches of those who are far from being painters, have been produced. Imitations, or mock representations of their first thoughts, confusedly mingled with their after-thoughts and corrections, have been made to pass current for taste and versatility of invention; "shameless bravura of hand," has been mistaken for boldness and freedom; and vague and gross smearings, and palpable neglect of form, have been palmed upon the public for "grace beyond the reach of Art," and "glorious departure from vulgar bounds."

It may be remembered that this fashionable but unfounded attachment to vague and slovenly prints which have usurped the name of Engravings, (and from which we cannot but apprehend danger to the unformed taste of a certain amiable and highly interesting class of society) has already engaged some portion of our attention. But, lest any part of my audience



should confound the use with the abuse of this species of art, it may not be improper to add, that the student may indulge his imagination, and perhaps refine his taste, upon sympathetic principles, by occasionally following the rapid flights of the artist's unbridled fancy; and the legitimate collector, disregarding the surreptitious value that mere rarity is sometimes supposed to bestow, may wish to possess these, while he sees or believes that the sketch or the scrap, is faithfully rendered or really by the hand of the master: but neither of these votaries of taste, will mistake the beginnings for the ends of art, and both will desire, by comparing the first thoughts with the mature reflections of the painter, to trace his intellectual progress.