WOOD-ENGRAVING: THE OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPRESSION IT AFFORDS TO ARTIST AND CRAFTSMAN: BY GARDNER TEALL

Here is something so simple, direct and final about wood-engraving, considered as a medium for art expression, that for centuries its appeal to the artist and the craftsman has been strong enough to give us a series of masterpieces in black and white worthy to rank beside those which add opulence of color to their charm of line and mass. Mantegna, Botticelli, Dürer, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Whistler and many other of our great painters have recognized and responded to this appeal. Mantegna’s individuality is shown even more in his engravings than in his frescoes, and Dürer, master craftsman that he was in so many forms of art, is better known today for his wood-engravings than for any other of his manifold achievements. Indeed, wood-engraving, from the time it emerged from infancy somewhere around the year Fourteen Hundred and Sixty-seven, has more forcefully than any other of the graphic arts, fostered and interpreted original thought by the directness and completeness with which it has lent itself to virile art expression.

At the present time there are strong indications of a revival of the fine old art of wood-engraving regarded as a means of direct expression rather than of mere reproduction. This is a part of the general

“THE SQUIRE’S SON”: BY GORDON CRAIG.
lived in poverty and sometimes very nearly starved to death, whose pictures afterward have sold for almost fabulous sums. Of course, it is a dream of every artist to produce something so wonderful that the world will accord it a place among the great achievements of art. But, while waiting and working for the recognition which is sometimes so late in coming, and doing "pot boilers" to keep the wolf from the door, is there not many a painter who could find a worthy means of expression in wood-engraving, so that, while waiting for the recognition that he feels must
tendency toward the revival of crafts of all kinds, and it is probable that its value to the artist will be recognized more and more widely as we receive fresh reminders of the fact that it combines in itself a means of original artistic expression and a product that has an intrinsic commercial value as opposed to the more or less fictitious value which is necessarily placed upon painting or sculpture. These last are valued according to the quality which makes people desire to own them. We have known too many instances of great artists who have

"THE WITCH": BY WILL BRADLEY.

"THE LITTLE BRIDGE": BY LOUISE GLAZIER.
come some day, he may be doing work which from the first will win its own recognition and bring its own returns?

An authority on the subject, writing in England about the technical side of wood-engraving as early as Eighteen Thirty-eight, said: "Perhaps no art exercised in this country is less known to the public than that of wood-engraving." The same is true in America today, but we are on the eve of a much greater general interest in the subject, which means that we are coming to a practical encouragement of the art, and the time is ripe for calling serious attention to the opportunities offered by wood-engraving for the expression of a personal art impulse in a way that, if directly and honestly done, is sure to find its own place and bring its own return.

When in the latter part of the nineteenth century, wood-engraving was chained to the task of reproducing painting, sculpture, wash drawing or line drawing, just as the half-tone does today, the art fell upon evil days. It was forgotten that wood-engraving had a manner of its own, a manner developed by men who realized all its limitations as well as its possibilities. But, when it was touched by such masters of the art as William Blake, Edward Calvert, Rossetti, Millais, Holman Hunt, Robert Bateman, F. Sandys, the brothers Dalziel, W. J. Linton and others of their time, it lived again. And now remarkable work is coming to us from across the sea, done by artists who have taken up the graver to record things that could not be expressed by painting, sculpture or etching, although any one of these more widely
dini, and in Germany, Austria and the northern countries the engravings of Jules Diez, Hugo Steiner, Fritz Erler and many others are becoming known by the strength and virility of their work upon the wood-block.

Gordon Craig, the versatile son of Ellen Terry, was drawn from dramatic to graphic art by the charm of wood-engraving, which he first took up as a pastime, and then, as its possibilities developed, devoted much of his time to giving the world an astonishing number of tiny masterpieces,—of which one is here reproduced from The recognized arts may occupy the greater part of their time and form their principal vocation. From England we have the work of Gordon Craig, Charles Dawson, Louise Glazier, Lucien Pissarro, Charles H. Shannon, T. Sturge Moore, Charles S. Ricketts and Clemence Housman. In France we find the work of Felix Vallotton, Paul Collin, Lépère, Henri Rivière and Léon Ruffé. In Italy notable work with the graver is being done by A. De Karolis, C. Luperni, L. Chiapperini, Baccio Bacci and A. Spa-
VALUE AND CHARM OF WOOD ENGRAVING

Page, which he illustrated, printed and published himself for some years. The work of Pissarro, Ricketts and Shannon made famous the Vale Press, and now the engravings of Lucien Pissarro and of Esther Pissarro, his wife, are much sought by artist-bibliophiles among the exquisite publications of their Eragny Press. All of these artists work along different lines. The two Pissarros seem to have absorbed the spirit of the old tapestry weavers. The art of Clemence Housman is mystically pagan and that of Gordon Craig is a very direct expression of himself. With Louise Glazier wood-engraving becomes delightfully pictorial, just as Will Bradley, on the other hand, would work for strikingly decorative qualities.

Paul Collin, the Frenchman, uses his art to awaken still another set of emotions, and all the Italians, A. De Karolis and the rest, have developed an art that, strange to say, seems to owe little, if anything, to the early Venetian, Florentine and other wood-engravers of the Renaissance. Every wood-cut reproduced here shows an individuality that is distinct from all the others,—an individuality quite as marked as the difference shown by one painting in a gallery from another of a different school. This power of expressing individuality is a characteristic that distinguishes all good examples of the art of wood-engraving, and one that not only gives interest and satisfaction to the artist himself, but lends zest to the researches of the collector. Nationality, however, leaves its general imprint less upon modern wood-engraving than it does upon painting or even etching. France, for instance, shows work of a dozen wood-engravers whose prints might as easily have come from Italy, Austria, Spain or England.

One sure sign that the revival of wood-engraving is finding a secure footing lies in the fact that more and more publishers are finding a place in books, in magazines and elsewhere for wood-engraving as it is done today. This seems to suggest strong possibilities of a practical future, and the promise is increased by the fact that it offers to the craftsman the advantage of possessing an art that fits in at all times with the doing of other things. One’s fancy may take flight with the drying palette of an interrupted painting or become wrecked upon the shoals of a postponed acid bath for an etching, or the clay may harden before the sculptor can return to it, but wood-engraving is just as obliging as it was the day when Albrecht Dürer journeyed from Nürnberg to Venice, taking out his wood-blocks and gravers to while away an hour or two now and then when detained en route at a wayside inn; always finding the work precisely as he had left it and ready to suggest the inspiration that came all the easier from finding no obstacles to its final accomplishment.