

## A GOLDEN DECADE IN ENGLISH ART

THE most perfect English art in black and white was done between the years 1860 and 1870. What an absurdity! of course; for Blake was absurd, Alfred Stevens ridiculous, Keene ignored, Whistler a joke. And yet, when the amateur tires of his postage-stamp and the young lady with no books wearies of her book-plate, when all the sham Bartolozzis have been shipped to America and the Japanese print outweighs the bank-note, then the English illustration of 1860 may possibly be invented, and Art may be once again upon the town. I use the date 1860, but I ask for as much latitude as one is granted in speaking of the Romanticists and 1830, with whom the men of 1860 are worthy to be ranked.

No matter how little we like to acknowledge it, many of our luxuries and necessities come from Germany; and it is to Germany that one turns for the inspiration of modern illustration, and to Adolph Menzel as its prophet. When, in the late thirties, Menzel was working on his various versions of "Frederick the Great," seeing the results obtained in Curmer's "Paul et Virginie," he confided some of the designs he had drawn upon the wood-block to an Anglo-French firm of wood engravers, Andrew Best Leloir; but he was not satisfied with the results, which may be seen in the earlier part of Kugler's "Frederick the Great"; so he trained his own engravers—Kreutzchmar, Bentworth, Unzelmann, the Vogels—and between them they produced those triumphs of German art which gave the direct inspiration to modern English illustration. They are: "The Life of Frederick," 1840; "The Uniforms of the Army of Frederick," 1852, a supplement; "The Works of Frederick," 1850; "The Heroes of War and Peace," 1856. These books, I have been informed—and I have been told the facts by the artists and engravers and publishers themselves—did have their effect in the following ten years, if they did not produce a sensation in England

immediately on their appearance in Germany, or even on their re-publication here, for "The Life of Frederick the Great," Kugler's "Geschichte Friedrichs des Grossen," 1840, was issued here by Bohn in 1845 as "A Pictorial History of Germany," though the others have never appeared in English dress. The first book which shows this influence is William Allingham's "The Music Master," 1855; and I maintain that Rossetti in his drawings—that is, in his method of drawing for engraving as shown in this book—must have been inspired by Menzel, for no book like it had been illustrated in England, nor had similar illustrations been made previously in this country. Rossetti, Millais and Arthur Hughes did the drawings. Rossetti furnished the frontispiece: "A youth listening in rapt mood to the chaunt of three mystic women—the maids of Elfin Mere." Burne-Jones then thought it the most beautiful drawing, for an illustration, that he had ever seen. Yet Mr. W. M. Rossetti says his brother was highly dissatisfied, and regarded the woodcut (of course it was a wood engraving) by Messrs. Dalziel as a decided travesty of his work. What would he have thought had it been done a little earlier?

Next year, 1856, Samuel Palmer—who had been following the tradition of Blake and that lovely decorator, Calvert—illustrated one chapter: "The Distant Hills," for Adams's "Sacred Allegories," with nine drawings. Three or four of these must rank with Turner. Palmer has given the effect of the setting sun over great landscape as no one ever did before, as no one has attempted since.

The year 1857 is a memorable one—the year of Moxon's "Tennyson"; the herald of Millais' genius as an illustrator. The book contains the famous Rossetti drawings and Holman Hunt's best design, "The Lady of Shallot"; but the rest of the illustrations are weak, poor, commonplace. The engravings, of which one hears little that is good, are by Dalziel and Linton. It is most interesting to compare the engraving of "Sir Galahad"—from the Rossetti drawing done by Linton, which is quite characterless so far as the work of Rossetti goes (or, rather, Lintonesque, save in the small heads, which are very good)—with the first drawing in the "Palace of

Art," by Dalziel, also after Rossetti, which is brilliant and individual by comparison. Yet Rossetti himself, so his brother says, preferred the Linton to the Dalziel.

Mr. Ruskin backs Rossetti, too, in his denunciation of the engravers; but this is not of much importance, as in a few years, just after the very best work had been done, he attacked artists and engravers both, saying: "Cheap popular art cannot draw for you beauty, sense, honesty; but every species of distorted vice—the idiot, the blackguard, the coxcomb, the paltry fool, the degraded woman—are pictured for your honourable pleasure on every page. These are favourably representative of the entire art industry of the modern Press." This is a criticism of these men and these books.

In the same year, a book, the illustrated edition of which is quite unheard of—Willmot's "Sacred Poetry"—was published. In this was maintained an all-round standard of greater merit in design and engraving even than in the "Tennyson," for among the contributors were Madox Brown, Tenniel, Harvey, Foster, Arthur Hughes, Harding, Millais and Gilbert, engraved by Dalziel; there were fewer Academicians, and the men knew better how to draw on wood.

In 1858, John Gilbert, even then the Nestor of English illustration, obtained his chance, and the magnificent "Shakespeare," also engraved by Dalziel, was commenced, and continued during the two following years. This is Gilbert's masterpiece, and still remains the finest complete illustrated edition of Shakespeare. It came out in parts, and is probably the first example, among these books, of the present popular fashion of issuing books in parts.

If 1857 was notable, 1859 is destined to become historic, for it marks the starting of *Once a Week*, soon to become synonymous with good illustration. The first volume is more an array of names than a distinguished accomplishment. Millais did eight drawings for it, not one of which can be compared with his designs for the "Tennyson"; though he was beginning that series of studies of the costume and furniture of the period, the crinoline, the chignon and the what-not, that we now find so amusing. Harvey did one drawing, and there are a number by Phiz, Leech, Tenniel, and many

crude things signed "Keene" which are commonplace. They were all engraved by Swain, or, as Keene himself put it, they fell before the graver of Swain. After this, Keene appears continuously, always more and more interesting; but, save for his "Caudle Lectures," 1865, he is scarcely a book illustrator. Yet his fame is secure, his position as an illustrator is acknowledged.

I have said already that it is to these books and magazines that we must turn for all that is left of the English illustration of the sixties; for this reason, the final finished drawings were made on the wood-block, and, consequently, engraved all to pieces; and, save those wood-blocks, most of which have vanished, and, possibly, some engravers' proofs and the prints in the magazines and books themselves, there is absolutely nothing else left. Therefore the world, which always wants what it cannot have, may some day understand how important are these early volumes.

To the first number of the *Cornhill*, 1860, Thackeray, more or less worked over by ghosts and engravers, contributed the illustrations for "Lovel the Widower." But, in the second or third number, Millais was called in, and then G. A. Sala, to complete the work. Frederick Sandys illustrated the "Legend of the Portent"; this is, so far as I know, his first appearance as a book illustrator; the lithographed burlesque of "Sir Isumbras" is earlier. And the volume ends with Millais' splendid "Was it not a Lie?" an illustration to "Framley Parsonage." From that time forward Millais gives character and distinction to its pages. The grace of the crinoline, the beauty of the frock-coat and the top hat, the daintiness of the pantalette, are shown in every number, while the pre-æsthetic houses are full of interest. It is curious to note that either Thackeray or the publisher refused to mention the names of the artists in any way. Millais and Sala alone signed their designs with their monograms. Sir Frederick Leighton, I imagine, contributed the "Great God Pan" (signed "L.") in the second volume; while his drawings for "Romola" were also among the special attractions in 1863. Richard Doyle began his "Birdseye Views of Society" in the third; but it was not until more than half-way through this volume that the initials "F. W." appeared on what were supposed to be Thackeray's drawings—or, rather, it was

not until then that the great author acknowledged his failure as an illustrator. But in one of his "Roundabout Papers," eventually, he admitted his indebtedness to Walker with the best grace in the world. The first drawing in the *Cornhill* signed by Walker—a fact interesting enough to be recorded—faces page 556, in the volume for 1861: it is the "Nurse and Doctor," an illustration to Thackeray's "Philip."

*Good Words* also was started in 1860, and attracted certain young Scotsmen—Orchardson, Pettie, Graham, MacWhirter. Even *Punch* was brilliant then, and its excellence was due to Du Maurier and Keene; a Du Maurier, however, that one would not recognise to-day.

I do not know of any notable books in 1861, though G. H. Bennett's *magnum opus*, Quarles' "Emblems," appeared in that year, and, I believe, was popular. But in 1862, Miss Rossetti's "Poems," illustrated by her brother with two drawings, came out; Rossetti also designed the cover. The illustrations can hardly be called satisfactory as illustrations, for the two Lizzies are quite different—the first, a country girl; the second, a stately Rossetti woman. The second edition contains two more drawings, which were added in 1866. William Morris engraved the frontispiece to this book, signed "M MF & Co."

The illustrations for these magazines and books were done in a curious but very interesting way; the entire work was undertaken by two firms, Messrs. Dalziel and Swain. They commissioned the drawings from the artists, and then engraved them; the method seems to have been so successful, that the engravers, notably the Dalziels, not only employed artists to make drawings and then engraved the blocks themselves, but became their own printers as well. It was in this manner that they produced the books which are bound to become the admiration and despair of the intelligent and artistic collector. When the books were printed they were sold to a publisher, who merely put his imprint on them; but to this day they are known as "Dalziel's Illustrated Editions," that is, when they are known at all. The first important book of the series which I have seen is Birket Foster's "Pictures of English Landscape," 1863 (Routledge), printed by Dalziel, with "Pictures in Words," by Tom Taylor. The binding is atrocious; the paper is spotting

and losing colour; but the drawings must have been exquisite, and here and there the ink is spreading and giving a lovely tone, like that of an etching, to the prints on the pages. This autumn it was revived, by Nimmo, with literary selections by Mr. John Davidson; of course there is no mention of the fact that the engravings were made thirty-two years ago. In the same year, F. Shields did a shilling edition of Defoe's "Plague," containing six drawings, engraved by Swain and Moreton; this must be one of the earliest of illustrated shilling publications; it contains Mr. Shield's best designs. The dead-pit, into which, by the flaring light of torches, the bodies are being shot from a cart, is like Rembrandt in its power.

In 1864, Messrs. Dalziel, who had already in the previous year engraved the designs for *Good Words*, published in a volume Millais' "Parables of Our Lord," through Routledge. This book, issued in an atrocious binding described as elaborate (and it truly is), bound up so badly that it has broken all to pieces, and printed with a text in red and black, contains much of the strongest work Millais ever did. Nothing could excel in dramatic power, or in effect of light, "The Enemy Sowing Tares," and the "Lost Piece of Silver," or in beauty of line or realistic treatment of the foreground, "The Sower,"—to mention but three blocks where so many are so good. The whole book is excellent, and is now excessively rare in its first edition. In this year also, W. J. Linton illustrated Mrs. Lynn Linton's "Lake Country" (Smith, Elder & Co.), drawing and engraving the pictures; it is a curious book, and exemplifies, I suppose, Mr. Linton's methods; of which I may say, I had rather he engraved his own designs than mine.

But 1865 is the most notable year of all. To it belongs Dalziel's illustrated "Arabian Nights' Entertainments," originally published in parts, and, later, in two volumes, with text and pictures enclosed in horrid borders (Ward & Lock). In this book, A. Boyd Houghton first showed what a really great man he was. He clearly proved himself a master in technique as well as in imagination, and, although he had as fellow illustrators Sir J. E. Millais, J. D. Watson, Sir John Tenniel, G. J. Pinwell and Thomas Dalziel, Houghton towers above them all. Mr. Lawrence

Housman, in an able article on him in *Bibliographica*, well says: "Among artists and those who care at all deeply for the great things of Art, he cannot be forgotten; for them, his work is too much an influence and a problem; and though, officially, the Academy shuts its mouth at him . . . certain of its leading lights have been heard unofficially to declare 'that he was the greatest artist who has appeared in England in black and white.' Technically, his work, always in line, with a brush or pencil, is most simple and powerful; the values of white asserted by the yard. Broad white upon black, black upon broad white; yet there is searching draughtsmanship, marvels of subtle modelling, and always the strange realism that gives rags their squalor, limbs the hairiness of life."

In 1865, also, Houghton's "Home Thoughts and Home Scenes" was published by Routledge. It is much less imaginative than his later work, but contains, perhaps, more that is beautiful, studies of child-life, charmingly seen, beautifully drawn. After this, he worked prodigiously, and yet excellently. His edition of "Don Quixote" (Warne), as a whole rather over rated, yet fine in parts, must be sought for now in the most out-of-the-way places. Very Spanish in character is the frontispiece; and his rendering of local colour in his books is all the more remarkable since I have heard he never was in Spain or the East. Easier to find are his "Kriloff's Fables," slight sketches published by Strahan in 1869. Best known of all are his drawings in the early numbers of the *Graphic*—the American series—which were not all published, I think, before he died. If some of them are grotesque, almost even to caricature, they are amazingly powerful; and, being the largest engraved works left, show him, fortunately, at his best. His original drawings scarcely exist at all; they were nearly all done on the wood; and though, at times, he made several versions of each, he seems to have destroyed all except the one that pleased him, and this disappeared in the engraving.

Another event was the publication of Ward & Lock's edition of Goldsmith, in which G. J. Pinwell revealed his marvellous powers; but Pinwell's most important work is for a late date.

In 1865, there must have been almost as many good illustrated magazines published in England alone as there are to-day in the whole world. Besides *Good Words*, the *Cornhill*, and *Once a Week*, there were *London Society*, the *Shilling Magazine*, the *Argosy*, and the *Quiver*. The uniform edition of Dickens was also being issued; illustrated by C. Green, Luke Fildes, Marcus Stone, J. Mahoney and F. Barnard.



F. Sandys is, in imaginative power, the greatest of all these artists; in technique he is the legitimate successor of Durer, in popularity he is a hopeless failure. He has never illustrated a book; so far as I know, he made but few drawings specially for books; these few are contained in Willmot's "Sacred Poetry," 1863, "Life's Journey," the "Little Mourner," and Dalziel's "Bible Gallery."



In 1861, a number of his drawings were printed in *Once a Week*—“Yet once more let the Organ play,” “Three Statues of Ægina,” and others. In every one is seen the hand of the man able to carry on the tradition of Durer, and yet bring it into line with modern methods. So far as I am



aware, Ruskin never mentions him; how far this was owing to the famous Sir Isumbras caricature, “The Nightmare,” I do not know. All the spirit of early German art breathes through his drawings. But it is during the next year, 1862, that Sandys, becoming accustomed to the wood-block, did

some of his most powerful work—"The Old Chartist," "Harold," and "King Warwulf," in *Once a Week*. In "The Old Chartist" there is the real Durer feeling in the distant landscape, but the trees are better than Durer's trees, and the figure is one that Sandys has seen for himself. But in all his work there is this evidence of things seen and studied. 1862 was his most productive year; in 1863 there are but four drawings; none in 1864; in 1865, a magnificent "Amor Mundi," for Miss Rossetti's poem, printed in the April number of the *Shilling Magazine*. After that there are only one or two, and then he disappears. There are many drawings by him on paper, but it is safe to say no man who did so few drawings on wood ever made such a reputation. True, Whistler only did four in *Once a Week* (1861-2), among them the charming design printed in this article, but he was known as an etcher and painter at the time. Whistler also contributed to a "Catalogue of Blue and White," published by Ellis & Elvey, in 1878, illustrated by auto-types, which will one day rank with Jacquemart's books; but this was only issued in a very limited edition.

After 1865, we find that the books contain better illustrations than the magazines, attracting the better men by the greater care with which they were printed and the larger size of the pages. However, Du Maurier, Keene, Lawless, Millais and Small still contributed regularly to the magazines.

Expensive gift-books by Houghton, Pinwell, North and Walker were then commenced, perfectly new drawings being used for their illustration. In 1866, "A Round of Days" was issued by Routledge; Walker, North, Pinwell, and E. Dalziel come off best in this gorgeous morocco-covered volume, especially Dalziel, who contributes a striking nocturne; the beauty of night, discovered by Whistler, being duly appreciated by these illustrators. Houghton's edition of "Don Quixote" is another of the books of 1866.

In 1867, "Wayside Posies" and Jean Ingelow's "Poems" were published by Routledge and Longmans respectively. These two books reach the high-water mark of English illustration; in them, North and Pinwell surpass themselves—the one in landscape, the other in figure—and Edward Dalziel is quite amazing in studies of mist and rain, which I imagine were, at the

time, absolutely unnoticed by the critics. The drawings of the school, however, must have been popular, for Smith, Elder & Co. reprinted the Walkers from the *Cornhill* in a "Gallery," in 1864; Strahan, in 1866, collected the Millais drawings in a portfolio; and in 1867, "Touches of Nature," also from the magazines, printed, it is said, from the original blocks. Possibly this was meant as an atonement for the shabby way in which the artists had been treated in the magazines.

In 1868, "The North Coast," by Buchanan, was issued by Routledge; much good work by Houghton is hidden away in its pages. The next year the *Graphic* was started, and these books virtually ceased to appear. There were some spasmodic efforts to produce new ones, most notable of which were Whympers magnificent "Scrambles amongst the Alps," containing J. Mahoney's best drawings and Whympers best engravings, Tenniels editions of "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking Glass," Miss Rossetti's "Sing-Song," illustrated by Arthur Hughes, 1872, and "Historical and Legendary Ballads" (Chatto & Windus), 1876, made up from the early numbers of the magazines, and specially interesting because of the rare drawings by Whistler and Sandys which are included. It is almost the only book in which one can find the work of these two men, although their drawings were not done originally for it, as the editor would like one to believe.

The *Graphic* printed a Portfolio in 1877, made up from early numbers. In 1878, "Nature Pictures," drawn by J. H. Dell and engraved by Patterson, was issued; as an example of what facsimile wood-engraving is capable of, it is amazing, the most elaborate penwork being wonderfully facsimiled in wood.

Dalziels produced at least two books later on, magnificent India proofs of "English Rustic Pictures," printed from the original blocks by Pinwell and Walker, done for the books I have mentioned (this volume is undated); and the "Bible Gallery" (1881), the drawings for which had been made long before and kept back till they could be photographed on wood. Many of these drawings, which a few years ago they vainly tried to sell, are now among the treasures of South Kensington. All the best-known artists contributed

to the "Bible Gallery," yet the result was not altogether a success. The most conspicuously good drawings are by Ford Madox Brown, Leighton, Burne-Jones, Sandys, Poynter, Houghton and Dalziel. It is the last great English book illustrated by a band of artists and engravers working together. Whether the results are satisfactory or not, the fact remains that the engravers were most enthusiastic, and encouraged the artists as no one has done since in the making of books; and the artists were the most distinguished draughtsmen who have ever appeared in England. In the early numbers of the *Graphic* there are also many marvellous designs by these men, and by Green, Fildes, Linton, Macbeth and Herkomer. In fact, in not a few cases the most distinguished work of the present R.A.'s is to be found, in black and white, in the *Graphic*.

I am perfectly aware that this is by no means a complete list of the books of what I have called the 1860 period. It is but an attempt to point out the great value and importance of the illustrations contained in these books, many of which, so far as their pictures go, are as important as those of the fifteenth century. Yet no record of them has been made; they are almost unknown, save to artists. Among artists, however, there is a rapidly-growing admiration for English art of this period, and in ten years' time these books will be rightly considered the treasure-houses of the golden decade of English art.

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