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WOODCUTS AND SOME WORDS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ON THE ART OF THE THEATRE
TOWARDS A NEW THEATRE
THE THEATRE ADVANCING
SCENE

UNFINISHED BLOCK 1911

WOODCUTS
AND SOME WORDS

BY EDWARD GORDON CRAIG

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CAMPBELL DODGSON, C.B.E.

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INTRODUCTION

Gifted, as a writer, with the courage of perennial youth; as a wood-engraver, with experience and taste acquired by five and twenty years of practice; as a reformer of the stage, with faith and hope, and even, to an appreciable degree, with charity, Mr. Gordon Craig came well equipped to the task of which this volume is the achievement. If a first perusal of his essay leaves the reader somewhat breathless, it is only in part because he has been made to gasp at the audacity of the rapid thrusts and swift transitions, at the suddenness with which, when he thought he was comfortably settled in the stalls, he found himself snatched from any risk of slumberous ease and planted before the wood-engraver's table, with a light thrown down on the block instead of, I was nearly writing, thrown up from the footlights; but, of course, in Mr. Craig's theatre, that is the last place the light would be likely to come from. No, seriously speaking, the breathlessness is mainly due to the impossibility of stopping anywhere, from start to finish, in reading this fresh and engaging composition.

It is appetising as a cake of many colours at Rumpelmayer's, with delicious strata cleft by the knife. I must not press the metaphor too far, for I am not quite sure what the knife is; it must be either the reader's rapid zeal—in my case I think it really was—or else (a more prosaic solution) a table of contents disclosing at a glance what the book is made of. Till the book

is out, I am not quite sure whether there is going to be one. But certainly Mr. Craig's book is made of many layers, and all of them good food for the mind. The cake is iced, in two colours, with quotations. I vote, with Mr. Craig, for Redon against Ruskin, though Redon was speaking of lithography, and of a richer, "fatter," black than even the wood-block can produce, when he wrote his locus classicus *on "le noir."* [1]

Then there is a good thick layer of autobiography—I am not quite sure whether there has been a wood-engraver's autobiography since Bewick's. This one, if informal, is very lively and instructive to other wood-engravers. It is also richly flavoured with the theatre; indeed, the autobiographical stratum is really overlaid with a thin theatrical layer, mainly about programmes, immediately under the icing, like almond paste. Reminiscences of Mr. Nicholson in the nineties lead, through Mr. Pryde, straight into the theatre again; quite a thin bit of boxwood follows between "the boards," then lots of theatre in the middle of the cake, while there is a nearly solid bulk of wood-engraving varied by other thin slabs of autobiography, with German or Italian flavouring, towards the end, the bottom inch, or so, of the cake being particularly nutritious and instructive to the young. But I must not omit a stratum which is pure cream. This is the enchanting description of Mr. Lacey Evans, vendor of second-hand blocks in Red Lion Court, off Fleet Street. Why does it remind me of Charles Lamb? It is not quite in his manner, but it is just as good. Mr. Max Beerbohm is not the only Englishman living at Rapallo who is a master of twentieth-century prose.

[1] *"J'ai donc regardé et scruté mes noirs, et c'est surtout dans les lithographies que ces noirs ont leur éclat intégral, leur éclat sans mélange." This precedes the passage which is quoted (abridged) by Mr. Craig.*

I fear, however, that I am trespassing on other people's ground when I venture to praise Mr. Craig the author. I have still more diffidence in expressing any opinion about Mr. Craig the reformer of the stage. He and the unreformed managers may still wage, for me, their prolonged and ill-matched warfare. I am a neutral not to be tempted into propaganda, and would not break a lance, if I owned such a thing, for either side. My business here, I conceive, is to speak about Mr. Craig the wood-engraver, and the art which he practises with a skill to which the illustrations in this volume bear eloquent witness.

I have taken, for almost precisely the same number of years as Mr. Gordon Craig himself, a keen interest in woodcuts. It was in 1895 *that Mr. William Mitchell presented to the Print Room a splendid collection of woodcuts by the old masters of the Italian, Dutch, and especially the German Schools, and I was set to work at cataloguing them, a task not yet completed. (I am dropping into autobiography; it must be Mr. Craig's example that compels it.) In the course of these studies, by the way, I soon learned that cross-hatching came into use in the fifteenth century, and was brought to its ripest perfection as early as* 1511 *by the engraver who cut Dürer's large block, incomparable in its way, of the Holy Trinity. Thus I cannot commend Mr. Gordon Craig's* obiter dictum *that cross-hatching is only useful in etching, and "after having found it useful there the studios passed it on to one another." It belongs, of course, especially to facsimile wood-engraving, which Dürer and Holbein trained their executants to perform with astonishing virtuosity, and that is not the kind of wood-engraving which Mr. Craig either practises or preaches. Cross-hatching engraved with the burin or cut with the knife is only an imitation, as exact as the engraver has skill to make it,*

of cross-hatching drawn with the pen. For this kind of facsimile engraving, as well as for other kinds of wood-engraving, I have a great respect; not being an artist, who is generally the devotee of the one style and the sworn foe of the other. But it is now almost extinct, and in 1895 *I believe that its life was only fostered by the Kelmscott Press and maintained in isolation by the skilful hands of Miss Clemence Housman. It was not till* 1901, *on Tenniel's death, that the cartoons which he had contributed to* Punch *for half a century ceased to be engraved on wood. They were about the last wood-engravings of the style associated with the names of Dalziel and Swain that the general public ever saw. But to return to* 1895, *the interesting first revival in England, since Blake and Calvert's time, of original wood-engraving was then still in its full vigour. The Vale group—Ricketts, Shannon, Savage, Sturge Moore, Pissarro — had but recently produced, or were still actively engaged in producing, their beautiful woodcuts. Many of the Vale and Eragny books containing them were still to come. Nicholson, as Mr. Craig tells us, was at work outside this group, and Strang was just about to take to the wood-block. It is to this period, of course, that Mr. Craig himself belongs, though his work was not confined to this period, and he has continued it, without much intermission, down to the present day.*

As displayed in this volume, it is mainly the work of a skilled executant, playing on tiny instruments tiny melodies full of charm for the attentive ear, but of a charm so reticent, so shy, that it may easily pass unheard. How many purchasers of programmes, I wonder, ever noticed their decorations or discovered that they were woodcuts at all? Mr. Craig is not a producer of big prints to be framed and to look well on a wall. Among the first ten

numbers of his list, down to 1899, *there are some larger, bolder woodcuts that make a strong appeal to the eye by their masses of black and white in contrast. Here, too, we shall find most obviously and without much search, the grey of which he speaks; in the coats of the men turning their backs on us in* Duc d'Anjou; *in the whole figure, visionary and semi-transparent, in contrast to the firm and tangible black background, of* D'Artagnan's Man; *in the lawn on which* The Lunatic *is standing. Quite early—it begins in Fig.* 4*—he has caught the trick which was known already to the engravers of the French* livres d'heures *of the early Renaissance, even earlier to the workers in the* manière criblée, *the trick of picking out from masses of black a multitude of tiny dots in white. We shall find him later on using it much more subtly, as in Fig.* 28, *not telling us quite so plainly that this is one of the ways in which variety of texture is achieved. As early as* 1900 (*Figs.* 12 *and* 13) *his palette is being more skilfully mixed; the transitions are less abrupt, the tones more subtly juxtaposed. But it is in pure line, I think, that he produced, by the simplest means most dexterously used, the best results of all. Notice the gradations produced by subtly varying the distances of line from line—their full charm will probably not survive the hand-printed proof—in the sky of Fig.* 16, *but notice especially the lovely line in the woodcuts that date from* 1907, *the period of the etchings for* Scene (*Figs.* 23, 26, 27). *These have in spite of their small scale a monumental grandeur, and because of it an intimacy that yields ever fresh delight to the eye that returns again and again in quest of subtleties and felicities in the finish of this or that inch of the surface. After the quiescent and marmoreal beauties of these stately columns the eye turns with a new pleasure to the vivid play of flame and wind in the two designs*

that follow (*Figs.* 32 *and* 36), *and is then arrested by the menacing form of the rampant* Chimera (*Fig.* 35) *so ably composed in the round. There is much charm in the little Tuscan landscapes, printed, I believe, as headpieces, or tailpieces, in* The Mask, *such as* Landscape and Moon (*Fig.* 28) (*this, I suppose, must be earlier than* The Mask *and perhaps not Tuscan*), View at Arcetri (*Fig.* 46), *the landscape, a San Gimignano in miniature, over which* The Two Masks (*Fig.* 40) *float in air, and* View over Florence (*Fig.* 49). *I am thrilled by the light and shadow of* The Hour-glass (*Fig.* 58), *pleased by the circles —not so much the obvious intersecting circles in the sky as the more ingenious and less apparent circles on the earth—in Fig.* 43, *and still more by the perspective of the tunnel-pergola which discloses, at the end of the intricate pleached alley,* King Lear (*Fig.* 44). *Lastly, I commend to the attention of the curious, for the skill with which they capture the spirit of early seventeenth-century Tuscany, the little set of prints to which* At the Play (*Fig.* 39) *forms a kind of prelude, but which soon brings us out, in* La Commedia (*Fig.* 56), *into the open air, and reaches its culmination in the little masterpiece* Hommage à Jacques Callot, *of* 1921 (*Fig.* 38), *a reminiscence, not a repetition, of a design which Mr. Craig had etched about ten years before as* Drama, *but now wrought into a more compact, rhythmical and perfect whole, offered in loyal and surely acceptable homage to the Little Master who was drawn by the magnetic attraction of the South from Lorraine to Tuscany.*

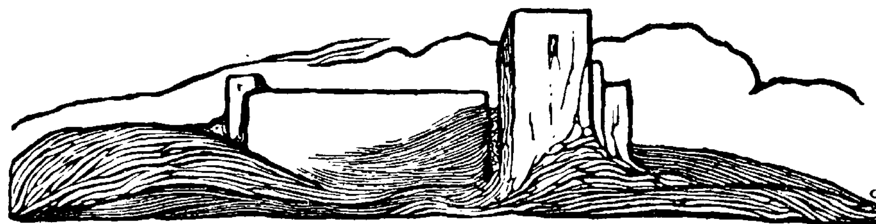
There are other possibilities in wood-engraving than those of which Mr. Gordon Craig has taken advantage; there are varieties of colour, innovations in the use of tools, which he has not attempted. It would be unjust to blame him who has achieved so much for not attempting more, and silly to expect one performer

to have at his command the full instrumentation of an orchestra. The small, exquisite art that he has developed as his own is in perfect harmony and proportion with the little pieces of yellow, polished boxwood that he loves. Is it not a great thing to achieve perfect proportion and harmony even in little?

I will say no more, lest I should spoil the appetite of the expectant reader for the icing in black and white, and the almond paste and the lower strata.

CAMPBELL DODGSON.

31*st October*, 1923.



FOREWORD

IN this book I have not attempted to teach anyone how to wood-engrave. It is the kind of thing, I suppose, one can show in half an hour better than explain in half a year. I have merely reproduced for you some of my woodcuts made between 1898 and 1921 and added a few pages as preface about a few of my old friends, myself, and my cuts, and a few suggestions for the young woodcutter at the end.

I fear that I am not very skilful with my knives and box-wood blocks, but it is a satisfaction to me to be able to show you what I can do, however little, so that it may be counted as so much in my favour towards being practical, a virtue my critics deny me.

I have produced more wood-engravings than etchings, and more etchings than plays.

To wood-engrave and print one's cuts costs so little, say one shilling and ninepence to cut and print one design.

To etch and print the plate costs more, say nine shillings or fifteen shillings per design.

To produce a play costs a great deal. But there is another reason than the cost which has prevented me from producing for you at least fifty plays.

If you had asked me to cut and engrave wood-blocks or etchings under someone's management, in someone else's

house, I should have made no woodcuts or etchings at all. To me liberty is essential.

When you will allow me the liberty of my own house to produce plays for you in a playhouse of my own, I will with pleasure produce them as practically as I have done these designs—that is to say, by my own hand.

TWO NOTES ON WOOD-ENGRAVING

ENGLISH

SINCE, then, in wood printing, you print from the surface left solid; and, in metal printing, from the hollows cut into it, it follows that if you put few touches on wood, you draw, as on a slate, with white lines, leaving a quantity of black; but if you put few touches on metal, you draw with black lines, leaving a quantity of white.

Now the eye is not in the least offended by quantity of white, but is, or ought to be, greatly saddened and offended by quantity of black. Hence it follows that you must never put little work on wood.

JOHN RUSKIN (1819–1900), *Ariadne Florentina.*

FRENCH

BLACK is the most essential of all colours. It finds its glorification, its life, shall I say, in the direct and deeper springs in Nature. . . . Black should be respected. Nothing can prostitute it.

It does not please the eye nor awaken the sensuality.

It is an agent of the mind far more than the beautiful colours of the palette or prism. . . . In the Louvre the galleries devoted to drawings contain a far greater and purer sum of art than the galleries of paintings. But few visitors are to be seen there, the paintings being far more popular.

ODILON REDON (1840–1916).

CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION. By CAMPBELL DODGSON, C.B.E. v

FOREWORD xiii

TWO NOTES ON BLACK. By JOHN RUSKIN AND ODILON REDON . xv

TABLE OF CONTENTS xvii

A LIST OF THE WOODCUTS xix

PREFACE

Why I engraved, why not snap a Kodak?—How to engrave—The use of engraving to the theatre—Other reasons—Programmes —Professor Geheimrat 1

CHAPTER ONE

William Nicholson—James Pryde—Acting in the provinces—Footlights—Grease-paint and wigs—*Ion*—Chorley—*Peer Gynt*—*Hamlet*—The poetic plays—Not yet awake—I stage manage—Wood-cutting again—Grey—A little money—Irving—Much money: his policy—Actors' salaries at home and abroad—I go on strike—I attend dress-rehearsals—I draw for the Press—My sketches—The kindness of editors—*Bonnie Dundee*—I win a victory 7

CHAPTER TWO

What I lost—The Lyceum Theatre—*The Dead Heart*—Commercialism in the theatre — My friends in other lands — An ultimatum—"Do as was done last time"—We reject it—We go towards a new theatre 20

CHAPTER THREE

PAGE

What is a woodblock?—Paper and wood—Speed—Its value sometimes—An airship—The box tree—How to prepare a box block—Mr. Lacey Evans of Red Lion Court . . . 27

CHAPTER FOUR

Blocks engraved from 1895 to 1923—*The Page*—I produce three operas—Two programmes—I produce three plays and a half—I go to Germany—A German friend—*The Art of the Theatre* is published in English, German and Dutch—I go to Italy—*The Mask*—A prize 34

SIXTY REPRODUCTIONS OF WOODCUTS

A List of woodcuts designed and engraved between 1895 and 1923 . 99

SOMETHING USEFUL, I HOPE

A very little history—Woodcuts and printing machines—Modern English engravers—Some Frenchmen—Pen *v.* Woodcut—Wood-cutting not difficult—English, Turkish and American woods—How to preserve the box—How to draw on it—The tools—How to hold them—How to cut—What to avoid when cutting—Cross-hatching—Black and grey—How to print your own blocks—Initial letters as practice—My *Book of Penny Toys*—Last word 101

A LIST OF THE WOODCUTS

Frontispiece: An unfinished block 1911
1. There! 1898
2. The House 1898
3. Duc d'Anjou . . . 1898
4. The Plot thickens . 1898
5A. D'Artagnan's Man . 1898
5B &c. Proofs of No. 5A . 1898
6. The Orchestra . . . 1900
7. The Good Grey Poet . 1898
8. D'Artagnan in London. 1899
9. The Merman . . . 1899
10. The Lacquey . . . 1899
11. The Lunatic . . . 1899
12. Black, White and Grey 1900
13. Winchelsea . . . 1900
14. An English Lane . 1900
15. For *Dido and Æneas* . 1900
16. Design for a Backcloth. 1900
17. Design for a Label . 1900
18. January 1900
19. Design for a Backcloth 1900
20. Scene for a Play . . 1903
21. For *Bethlehem* . . 1903
22. The Two Ghosts . . 1901
23. In Italy 1907
24. Sunrise 1906
25. A Sphinx 1907
26. A Stage Scene . . 1907
27. "Scene" 1908
28. Landscape and Moon . 1907
29. Kings' Tombs . . 1911
30. A City 1907
31. City Walls . . . 1908
32. Troy 1908
33. A Stage Scene . . 1908
34. Torre dei Diavoli . . 1908
35. Chimera 1908
36. A Pyramid 1908
37. A Figure 1910
38. Hommage à Jacques Callot 1921
39. At the Play . . . 1908
40. Two Masks 1908
41. A Stage Scene . . 1908
42. Peep-show on the Sands 1908
43. A Stage Scene . . 1908
44. For *King Lear* . . 1908

45. *Taming of the Shrew,* Induction Scene ii. . 1908
46. View at Arcetri . . 1908
47. In Tuscany. . . 1909
48. A Headpiece . . 1910
49. View over Florence . 1908
50. A Mask . . . 1908
51. A Mask . . . 1908
52. Mask of Envy . . 1908
53. Scene for a Play . . 1909
54. Mask of a Bookseller . 1909
55. Arlecchino's Mask . 1911
56. La Commedia . . 1911
57. For *King Lear* . . 1920
58. For *The Hour-glass* . 1913

o Headpieces · Tailpieces o

TO BEGIN WITH

A PREFACE: in which it is stated what the book is all about. Why woodcuts—Why cut by hand—How the—what the—why the "celebrated stage reformer" makes these things too. Why not draw with a pen if you must draw, and have the time to spare. Suppose you have no time to spare—what then? Something about all this is what is here set down.

WHY did I wood-engrave? First: to teach myself how to design scenes for the Drama (I had already learnt how to rehearse them). But why cannot one learn to design scenes at a Dramatic School? Perhaps one can; but I knew of none at that time, and I know of none now. Then why not draw the scenes at home? Why cut them on blocks of hard wood?

For the explicit reason that wood-engraving, being a difficult task, lends the hand precision, perhaps some style, is a tough craft, and one to grow fond of. Mr. Bernard Shaw would use a Kodak—much more sensible. No craftsman is quite as sensible as that, and if Mr. Shaw doubt me, he must ask William Morris, the craftsman, whom he admired. There is good reason for an imaginative fellow having some tough craft; it cools his ardour, whereas the click of the Kodak

could but irritate it and finally render it a mechanical and prim ardour, while "we do the rest."

Woodcutting is somewhat risky. With this craft you may slip and cut your block across its face, or slip and send the knife into your left hand, the hand which holds steady the piece of boxwood on the table.

The surface of the block is very slippery and the tools do not always cut into the surface. When one is learning, they sometimes slip and slide across a block as one slips and slides and falls on ice. That is because one has tipped one's tool at the wrong angle. The right angle is only found by practice; and you need not think that means two and a half hours a day for six weeks at this one five-finger exercise. Getting the right angle at which to tip your tool depends on this: do not dig too deep, but do not ever come right up to the surface. Do not bear too heavily on the tool. Hold it lightly, but in a strong grip. At the end of this book I will go into these matters a little, but I could easier and would sooner show you in a half-hour what it takes several days to write of.

I BEGAN to engrave in 1893 or 1895. From 1898 to 1901 I was cutting boxwood all day. By 1900 I felt I had served a sufficiently long woodcutting apprenticeship to produce a play. You do not see the connection between chopping wood and theatricals, and yet there is one.

Woodcutting is useful to the designer of scenes and costumes, and so to the actors. Again, it is useful to the stage-manager who must be able to visualise the situations and characters for his actors. It is useful to the manager of a

theatre who wishes his programmes and posters to look well. So it is useful to four groups of people. It is also economic. It saves time. I can cut a block and can print thirty copies of my design, so that thirty actors shall each have a copy. All is, you see, for the actors—and it is their gratitude to me which has repaid all the pains.

Wood-engraving is useful to the designer of scenes and costumes, for if he cuts his designs on the wood, he always has the blocks at hand and he can, at any time, print off dozens of prints of each design, and then experiment on them with colour. I wanted Lovat Fraser to cut a block of his *Beggar's Opera* scene, print six to ten copies, and fill in the different changes of light and colour which happened as the play progressed. You'll recall how cleverly he used one scene, only changing it every quarter of an hour or so. I wanted these changes recorded; and while the artist can also do this by the long, wearisome process of drawing six to ten copies of the one scene, it is more practical to cut one design on wood, and print off the six to ten copies, for it saves time.

Now for the second reason why I learnt to engrave. When not acting I used always to go to other theatres and see other plays. I was never out of a theatre if I could help it. And while waiting for the curtain to rise, the attendant would offer me a chalky sheet of pretence calling itself paper, covered with all kinds of amusing advertisements, and say, "Sixpence, please." These chalky sheets of paper were accepted in those days as programmes. And being already bent on getting our theatre in order, in the waits between the acts I would read the programme and consider its paper, type-setting, and its illustrations and advertisements, and I would sometimes

seriously—even furiously—promise myself that I would have properly printed and designed programmes on good paper, with none but interesting advertisements in my theatre—it was always this—my theatre. I would have this design on Page One and that design on Page Two, and I imagined a new kind of programme—one which should be worth preserving—all hand-work—and I was ready to give my hand to the task, supposing I could not afford to employ others.[1]

People said that I was a visionary youth—an idealist—they meant it well. So did I, but I went better than that. I did what I meant, at the first opportunity, and I still do. People said I was a dreamer, but it seems they erred, for I have proof that I did what I dreamed. I began to do so in 1900. I applied what I knew of wood-engraving to the first three of my stage productions. I designed a programme for each. In 1900 a programme for *Dido and Æneas*. In 1901, another. In 1902, one for *Acis and Galatea* and *The Masque of Love*. They were small books of fifteen to thirty-three pages. I issued them at one shilling, giving a full shilling's worth in exchange. When I have the materials and people to do things with, and when I like the thing I am doing because of my friends' being near me, I enjoy to do a good deal with a theatre. You, who deny it, do about half that I did, I am coming to see, and rarely, if ever, do that by yourselves. It is about time

[1] Why so much fuss about a programme? No other reason than the ordinary wish to have everything in our theatre of the best. And since better every-day programmes exist in collections to prove that the production of a tenth-rate chalky bit of paper is an expensive hobby born in the mind of a well-to-do duffer become theatrical manager, why not do away with this expensive hobby of a grocer and substitute for it an ordinary good programme, cheap, well-printed, and not like chalk or cheese or a bunch of pressed violets? I suggest it is better when it looks like paper.

to speak out. I regret having to, but it is time. You call on an artist to help you, and then hide his name as much as possible. Some wanted to do that with me, wanted to do so ever since 1903. I am now without a theatre because I resisted that wretched tendency; I saw no reason why I should compromise.

Let us call up a few who deny that I am able to do these things. Professor Geheimrat is one of them. I regret to have to name him, but he is the head of a firm—not a fellow-artist—and I can no longer delay. You, dear Professor, are one of those who are continually overheard to say that you are about the only practical man of ideas in the theatre, and you especially make a point of saying that I can do nothing. I dream finely, you admit, but I do nothing—am not at all practical.

You have spread this untruth for some twenty years now.

Now come up to the table with me. What can you do?

Can you write a play or a book without help? Can you produce a play without your friend Reinhardt's assistants: Stern, Hollander, Vallentin, Kahan, and six or seven others? Can you design your scene, your dresses, alone? Rehearse the play alone? Was it you who conceived the Casket Scene in the *Merchant of Venice* with its giggling girls? You can engrave perhaps—on wood or metal, so that I can see your work? You can print what you engrave? Or can you do none of these things? I grant you are a good actor, but so am I perhaps; and you understand men and women and how to make them come here and go there. You are a centurion, in fact, you manage men,—but you yourself do damn little, Professor.

Your idea of doing is to make a number of others do the things while you "direct." Now workmen do not call that

practical. Yet you, and some hundreds like you, get great reputations for being practical executives and are only the farmers of our talent. Kolossal!

In England we have a few of these too. They are always eager to succeed, but also eager that we shall not succeed. For they credit us all with genius (the most detested word in England) and deny us practicality.

Of course what these gentlemen really mean is something quite different from what they say. They say of us, "He is not practical"; but they mean, "We cannot manage him." And that is a quite different thing.

So now you see the reasons why I learned to wood-engrave; the main one being that in the theatre I might practise what was so often being preached by others.

CHAPTER ONE

NOW that I have told you why I learned to practise wood-engraving, I will go on to say how I learnt it, and from whom.

First to attempt to acknowledge an old debt.

To William Nicholson I owe a great deal for showing me how to cut the first ditch in a piece of boxwood (and that's the difficult thing), for being generous in showing me how to go on, and in helping me to try to do what he was doing to perfection. This was all years ago—1892 or 1893, I think. It was in a cottage somewhere in England. I lived in another village and Nicholson and his brother-in-law, James Pryde, would pass through my village on the way from the station to their home, and would take me along to supper and high spirits.

Nicholson was always grown up. I suppose that's why they called him the "Kid." I was a quarter grown up then, Pryde was always old and young,—just right. Nicholson, being so old and wise, "deuced clever," someone called him, could turn from one process to another and master each in about three-quarters of an hour. So to etch, to paint in oils,

to paint in water colour, to paint on glass, to paint in tempera, fresco painting, lithography, wood-engraving, to invent new ways of making posters and invent better ways day after day, was as easy to him as it is for an all-round sportsman to turn from hockey to tennis, from tennis to polo, from polo to billiards, excelling in each, to everyone's delight and despair. Nicholson was like that; and, curiously enough, besides excelling in every branch of the technique of his art, he was skilful beyond words in handling anything where eye and hand and brain have to be under perfect control, and in absolute harmony. So that at games of cup and ball, I remember, he was good, at billiards good, rode a bicycle like a trick rider in a music hall, fenced admirably, and all the while he did these he laughed and talked unceasingly. So when he came to wood-engrave he mastered the whole craft in about twenty-five minutes. Into those twenty-five minutes he concentrated about six years' hard work. He had been looking at a number of old woodcuts, and at the elder Crawhall's things—which he loved immensely—and those started him going—and Nicholson started me going, and if I have never reached his mastery of the medium, it is because he was a born wood-engraver, whereas I only achieved some slight skill after immense labour.

I was a low-browed actor then, practising this old theatrical business, and about to set out into the provincial towns to play Hamlet, Romeo, Charles Surface, and some five or six other lesser rôles. I used a pencil at that time probably worse than any amateur, and even worse than Haviland did,[1] so it

[1] Haviland and his friend Harvey had a company of strolling actors at this time, and it was this company I joined. I was some ten years their junior, and about nineteen years old. On holidays, if not travelling, they would go out and fish or sketch, or both. Some picturesque bit of ruin, some old stream with the reflec-

was a privilege to know these two painters, Pryde and Nicholson, who had such immense talents, with such capacity to help.

Pryde used to enjoy acting in the same way that I enjoyed drawing. He could act about as badly as I could draw, but since each of us had his job—his profession—we could play about a bit at the other man's job and nothing mattered. He helped me often with a wise word, or even two, and when I was stage-managing and he a super, I spoke so much wisdom that if it was all lost on him it was his fault. He was very happy when "making up," as it is called, and would arrive at the theatre about two and a half hours before the performance, and, if possible, three hours before. This time he gave to painting his face is odd, for the appearance of his face never changed all the time I knew him as an actor. Whatever part he played, if the First Priest in *Hamlet* or the Porter in *Macbeth* (and he was the best Porter Wallingford ever saw), he was always the same upright, well-powdered, utterly undramatic, conscious, nervous James Pryde. If he had had to play a witch in *Macbeth*, he would have appeared stately, upright and powdered as usual. But Pryde loved the stage just as a performer loves it, and it had a way of keeping him young. He was shy when on a stage at rehearsal; erect and stately, but terribly shy, never familiar with the magic place, always open-eyed in muffled wonder, amazed, and determined not to show that he realised he was in heaven. And this is what would have ultimately brought him to be a very fine actor, or something valuable to the theatre. He was truly its devoted

tion of a castle in the water, or some wrinkled old peasant leading an ox, would appeal to Harvey and Haviland. They would make very skilful sketches, but I would fail utterly, blundering at every step; and Haviland and Harvey quite unable to help me.

and faithful servant, and I think still is. Others are kind about our failings; he did not see them.

At that time it did not occur to me that I could do anything as a producer of plays, or that I should later put my scrap of experience as a wood-engraver to any practical use. I was quite convinced that acting and make-up and costumes and the words were the be-all and the end-all of the Art of the Theatre; and had you told me at that time that I should some day cease to act, I should have smiled the hearty and forgiving smile of youth at you, and laughed at your prediction. I saw everything in terms of the recently-discovered footlights, and grease paints, the old wigs, whispers, roars, and the centre of the stage. I may add I see these things still, and I love them still, but they are not everything to me. They were once, though,[1] and I learnt dozens of parts, worked out how I could play characters I never have played. I worked at a thing called *Ion*. I suppose not everyone has heard of the play. It is by one of those very important play-writers of London with influence. It is by Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd. It was acted by Mr. Macready for the first time on 26th May, 1836, and a grand supper was given after the play, at Talfourd's, at which were Wordsworth, Landor, Browning and Miss Mitford. Chorley, whom you all know—*the* Chorley—wrote of this play: "When Talfourd's *Ion* was published, it appeared to myself (and still appears) to be the most noble, highly finished, and picturesque modern classical tragedy on

[1] And some people even think they are everything still. Thank heaven these people have the same capacity for error as all the rest of us. Their error lies in their not having inquired. Inquiry will show us that the theatre is a composite affair of acting, voice, and scene, a tremendous thing, and, though I don't wish to be provocative, a still almost undiscovered land.

the English stage. It was not its large private distribution, not merely the great reputation of its author, but the vital, pathetic excellence of the drama, and the rich poetry of the diction, which, on the night of the production of the play at Covent Garden, filled that great theatre with an audience the like of which, in point of distinction, I have never seen in any English theatre. There were the flower of our poets, the best of our lawyers, artists of every world, and of every quality. There was a poor actor of some enterprise and promise, Mr. Cathcart, who, in the fulness of zeal and expectation, absolutely walked up to London from Brighton to be present at the first performance."[1]

While you all remember Chorley, some of you may, by now, have forgotten that at this first night of *Ion*, "*the* most noble, highly finished tragedy," was "*the* most distinguished audience" Chorley had ever seen in any English theatre.

I myself cannot recall Chorley, nor whether he was the Henry Fothergill, or the John Rutter, or the simpler Charles. There were three.

But on realising that I have forgotten him, since I never heard his name mentioned in my life, and that it was only by the grace of Henry Saxe Wyndham that I ever came across his name (even Wyndham fails to put his name in the index), I am set wondering how this is. I wonder will the many critics, members like Chorley, of the *Athenæum*, able to write like Chorley, and to say to-day that they were present at *the* most noble, highly finished performance when the theatre was filled with *the* most distinguished audience London has

[1] *The Annals of Covent Garden Theatre*, by Henry Saxe Wyndham. Chatto and Windus (1906). 2 volumes.

ever known, I wonder will these critics be so utterly forgotten by somebody as by me to-day Chorley, even the great (and powerful) Chorley, is forgotten. I suppose I am the only one who forgets Chorley, or does someone else forget him too?

And it was this play *Ion*, by the great British dramatist Talfourd, which somehow got into my hands and I would spout while studying in my room. If Chorley could have seen me he would have been prophetic. "There is a young man coming," he would have written, "who is destined to be *the* most wonderful, highly finished, and picturesque Ion that the coming centuries will ever see." Only Chorley would have been wrong, for Ion was destined to be a little forgotten, and I merely destined to draw attention to the fact.

Besides Ion I also worked at Peer Gynt. It was to be one of my great rôles; I promised myself that I would rouse a London audience some day as Peer Gynt, although unlike Chorley, I never bothered about whether it should be distinguished or no. Then Prince Hal in *Henry IV.* and Hotspur. I puzzled a way of playing both parts on one night—and the jealous rôles like Ford and Othello interested me so much that I myself became of a jealous disposition. Hamlet, of course; and he caused me six years of melancholy; and the younger man in the Browning play—Tresham is it? Anything too poetic like Florizel in *The Winter's Tale* or Ferdinand in *The Tempest*, or the forest lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I had no liking for. I was neither drawn towards them at all, nor did I comprehend what the plays were about. They seemed too vague, mystic, bodyless. And I was rather dependent on seeing a play or a rôle acted before I could size the thing up; somewhat as Nicholson was dependent on seeing a Craw-

hall before he could go ahead on a wood-block. But once seen I could still do but very little, whereas Nicholson could do, and did, everything. In short, in those days I was not awake, and he and most of my contemporaries were.

I was an actor, rather smitten with stage-managing, as smitten as any young fellow of to-day is; and stage-managing, at that time, meant to me being, if possible, a second Irving —without a struggle. It appealed to me as such a fine swaggery sort of job—to stand in the centre of a stage, surrounded by a staff of stage-carpenters, electricians, costumiers, and actors and actresses, and give the order to the prompter to begin Act II. Scene i.

"Ladies and gentlemen for Act II. Scene i.," calls the prompter and hustles the call-boy—even runs out into the street to call them—and in troop the fine men and women all looking grim or sunny according to their natures. But in those days, I had not produced a play. Later on I came to see that standing in the middle of the stage and making others do the work is not the sole qualification for being a producer.

But to return to the engravings. I cut as little as possible when Nicholson was about; the veriest fool would have abstained when such masterpieces were being rattled off as he was then creating; and it was only much later, when I had gone from the village, that I came to recall and look at those pretty pieces of yellow boxwood and the few tools which had lain untouched for so long. And more, perhaps, from a wish to recover something of the breath of old days than from any conviction that I was any good as an engraver, did I make some marks on the delicious smooth block and settle down to the delight of gouging out the white spaces.

And then when done, and idly dreaming that grey would be an addition to black and white, I began to cut fine lines close together which would form a grey when printed. Nicholson would have chuckled; grey to him was all nonsense—finicking. But he wasn't there and so I went on escaping from his influence, which I tried not to escape from.

You'll find a great deal of grey in my cuts, I don't know that it is at all successful except in some of the later cuts—in the cuts Nos. 36, 49 and 53. But what was, and is, very successful is this: The whole time I wood-engraved I learned what I had very great need to learn. Which was, first, how to design a little better, then, how not to slip, and incidentally how to make a little money.

I had need to make a little money, for I had given up acting. I had started in 1889 as an actor in the company of Henry Irving. He had a habit (a very bad one for the actor, but a sound, if unfair, one for the manager) of always paying his performers more than they were worth. I gather from what other actors have told me that this really was a habit of Irving's. So when I began in 1889 I was paid five pounds a week, which seems to me to be an immense sum for a beginner and an apprentice. I soon rose to six pounds, then to seven pounds, and I almost fancy I reached to eight pounds. I cannot remember. Him I remember; but not his devastating sums of money. I was worth two pounds at most, to begin with, and perhaps three pounds after the sixth year with him. I am told that in 1912, the good leading men of the French theatrical companies seldom received more than five pounds a week, and I am told that ten pounds a week, if as much, is all which is ever paid to a leading man in a foreign company. But of this I am not

sure. What I am sure of is that English and American salaries in 1889 far exceeded any salaries paid actors on the Continent, and still far exceed them. I do not mean by this that a few of the most celebrated Continental performers do not pay themselves large sums, but the other members of foreign companies —the second and third in order—do not receive very much. If the English actors realised how well their interests always were, and always are, considered by the English managers, I think there never would have been an Actors' Union. I am sorry there is one, although unexpected good results may come. It seems one can't ward off the good with which Fortune, fickle though she is, will incessantly be burdening the actors.

And good came to me even after I had taken the fatal leap from the services of the greatest actor of the age and certainly one of the best stage-managers of his time. In leaving the stage I gave up a solid eight pounds a week, for what?—for nothing. I did what I blame actors now for doing. I formed an actors' union, consisting of one member. It was a queer strike, the size of the conspiracy and the quality were the queer things. I formed an odd Labour Party—a strange anarchist, for I was alone. A Labour Party which consists of more than one member seems to me to be a strike below the belt, the anarchy of the mob a bit idiotic. For to strike, to labour, to anarch (if there be such a job) is deuced difficult, and a difficult thing must be done alone. Quiet is essential; silence imperative. *Then* when you strike, labour, or dance a war dance, something electric happens. No?—well, it is what happened with me—I woke up.

When I left off acting, and threw up eight pounds a week for nothing a month, except what friends would help one to,

things looked black, as was fitting—just the gloomy setting which such a situation deserves. And friends did help, that's the odd thing about it. I was allowed by some friends to attend the final rehearsals of new productions and make drawings of the actors for the serious and comic newspapers. The friendly editors of the serious newspapers would pay me very well, sometimes three pounds for a drawing. The *Daily Mail* once paid me ten shillings apiece for two drawings, one of Sir Henry Irving, the other of Laurence Irving. That was in *Robespierre*, the play written by M. Sardou and produced at the Lyceum in 1899. I have often wondered why the *Daily Mail* was so generous, for the drawings, if good, were not very large. Still, perhaps the sum was earnest of what was to come, and because I delivered them in good time; and to do this is not easy. Suppose the last rehearsal is on a Friday; one goes to the rehearsal and one sketches Irving and Laurence Irving and six or seven other actors. One lingers on to watch the rehearsal, always a Bacchic affair to anyone, and to me still more intoxicating — Apollonian, I suppose. Then one wrenches oneself away at about eight o'clock, one goes into a dull room and turns to look at the poor sketches one has made. The best are always of some inferior and unknown actor — they won't do for the journals. What does the *Mail* want with a portrait of Mr. Dodd as the first jailer, or Netty Blake as one of the mob? No—it must be the guv'nor or nothing. So one looks at the awful half-sketch one has made of the great figure, a sketch made while he was moving here and there at forty feet distance from one. One begins to make a careful drawing from the sketch and, to cut the matter short, in about two hours the wretched design is ready for the *Mail*. (How it

was that A. B. used to do his lightning work and get into the *Sporting and Dramatic* week by week in 1880; how Partridge, Forestier, Boyd, and some twenty-five others used to do the same for their journals, is still a mystery to me.) Then off to the editor's office. He may not want them. Never mind, here goes.

I was never commissioned to do a drawing for a paper; it was all chance whether one was accepted or not. Still, the editors I came across were always immensely kind about it all, and I would drop one here, one there, and by this means would make the "little money" I told you I needed to make. *The Tatler*, *The Sphere* were especially kind. Mr. Bulloch was then sub-editor of *The Sphere*, and he encouraged me more than he knows. And the *Lady's Pictorial*, *The Sketch*, *The*—I fear I forget some of the names for the moment—all helped.

And so by engraving I had learned more or less how to design a little better, and this made it possible for me to keep always in touch with the theatres while in the service of none. I was no longer obliged to go round searching for engagements. Out of the theatre, I thus remained in it; for of course I loved to be in the old place continually, even as now I am continually in it, be it a French, Italian, English, Dutch, German or Russian theatre.

Let me see if I can remember some of the people and plays I made sketches of. There was *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*, *The Last of the Dandies*, *Robespierre*, *Hamlet* with Mme. Bernhardt, *Merchant of Venice*, *Ulysses*, *Faust*, *Lyons Mail*, amongst the number of plays I attended and for which I drew and published some two or three sketches each. And there was *Bonnie Dundee*. I drew everyone in that production; I got into the theatre three nights before the last rehearsal,

for Taber, who was producing the play, would have heaps of dress rehearsals, and my sister Edith, who had made most of the dresses, was doing wonders—and wonders take time. There was Mackintosh—immense; I drew him. There was Tom Heslewood — tremendous; I drew him. Taber was gorgeous and down he went into my book; and little Miss Queenie Tarvin—I think she was there —in she went. Miss Christopher St. John—she too. I had better explain that the last-named lady was not acting in the production, but she was there at the rehearsal, and an extra drawing or so to a man mad about theatres and under the far-off influence of Apollo is a mere trifle. The drawing of Miss St. John, I was delighted to see the other day, has been preserved. One cannot ward off the good turns which Fortune will do us. The reason why the above Mackintosh, Tom, and Taber were immense, tremendous, and gorgeous is because they all wore wigs made for me. I mean the wigs were mighty things and mighty fine for the quick sketch, journalistic artist I was then pretending to be, mighty fine things with which to make another ten shillings. James II. wigs, they were. Anyone can draw a James II. wig. Try. All you have to do is to make the pencil go round and round and at the same time lower the pencil from north to south of the sheet of paper as you do it (see fig. A).

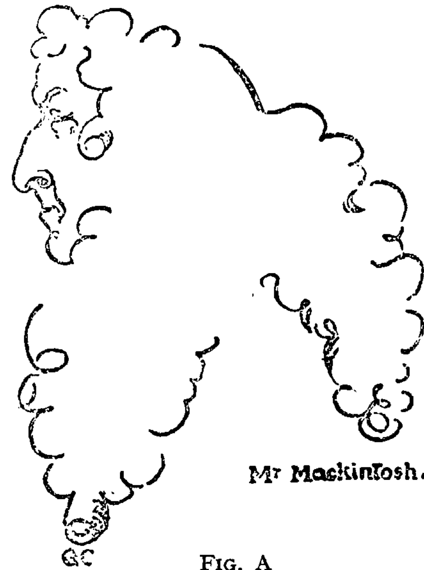
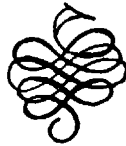


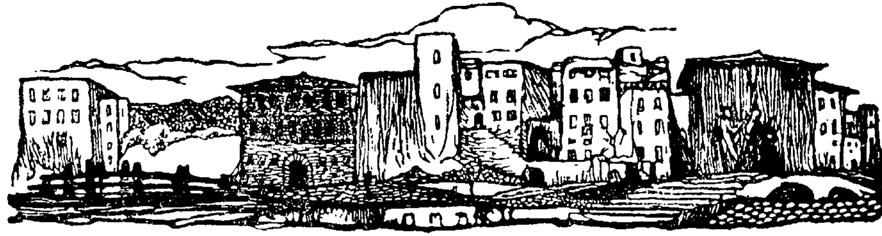
FIG. A

But even this won't pay well enough if you do nothing else. I was musing just now how easy it is to be a Labour leader and a strike-master when not bothered by the scruple of having to drag others along with you. I had struck for lower pay—and I got it. My victory was assured within twenty-four hours, and I have won ever since. There is only one thing on earth worth striking for, and that is lower wages. I struck—and immediately I began to have an inkling as to what the art of the theatre might be—an inkling, no more—and let me put that plainly for those who prefer it plain. The theatre will only return to health when its performers and the other artists will reduce the expenses, taking ten pounds a week instead of sixty. Or less; or still less than less. How do that? Place the old ideal first, not last. Think solely of the work, not the pay. But while to do that is good for the cause, it's not enough for the rent and the eatables. And if an old friend who here shall not be named had not stepped in at the moment and dropped the bag of pounds into my room—if a fair raven from the fiords had not winged its way to me with gifts from the gods in its beak—I sometimes think I should not be here writing this now.

For it brings no immediate comforts to strike, even if you strike alone. A fierce kind of joy—yes; but comforts—no.

I drew for journals; I designed bookplates; I did everything I could think of except take the money the stage was prepared to offer me if I would only do what it asked me to do—play some false tricks to the theatre and its art.





CHAPTER TWO

I CAN but count it a blessing that I meddled with wood-engraving. It may be said that had I not had the inclination for it, nor given it so much of my time, I should have been obliged to keep my nose to my own grindstone, that is to say, to the stage of a theatre.

I certainly did avoid a great deal of stage experience. For example, after 1903,[1] had I been obliged to enter an English theatre regularly, night by night, I might have kept my hand in—I wonder!—my nose certainly would have been ground off; and after that my brains ground out, my spirit ground down by prejudice, insularity, and all that was powerful in the London theatre; yet I would dearly have liked never to have had to leave the English theatre, even for a month.

Perhaps this statement needs qualifying. All the London theatres could surely not have been such tyrannical places as my words might lead you to suppose. Let me state as clearly as I can how it was that this London theatre was tyrannical to me as an artist.

First of all, it offered me no schooling. I came to the Lyceum Theatre in 1889 untrained. Irving, as I said, gave

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[1] By 1903 I had been an actor for eight years, a stage-manager for about six years, and had produced seven pieces: *On ne badine pas avec l'amour, Dido and Æneas, The Masque of Love, Acis and Galatea, Bethlehem, The Vikings, Much Ado About Nothing,* and part-produced *Sword and Song.*

me five pounds a week at once. I assumed, as best I could, the airs which go with so large a sum, such a head-turning salary as this. That sort of thing is not discipline, that is policy—the policy of a manager. I had to get through as best I could, without much understanding and with little talent and with no training, the part of a young man, a rather central figure in a play called *The Dead Heart*. I was eighteen years old. Now who was in the theatre on the first night of this play, who of my contemporaries? Mr. Max Beerbohm was one. I believe Mr. Aubrey Beardsley was another. Professor Rothenstein was there too, I think. Each of these representative men of their time; one to become the greatest living illustrator, one the head of the Royal College of Art, the other the writer of the finest prose of this day. Painting, drawing and letters have standards, and are judged by them. These standards helped to make these artists. The theatre has practically no standards. The mob is allowed to shout or hiss a performance in or out of existence. Had I at that time known this, I might have chosen another field in which to work. Had I been told that my theatre, dear as it was to me, was not going to fight against the prejudice it hugged and still hugs, was going to remain insular, was content in its conceit, was taking no steps to rid itself of its folly, I think I would have done as I have just now said.

But the truth is, I was devoted to the theatre just as I am devoted to it now, and that meant not seeing one of its faults. Yet it means more than that sometimes. For I see a few of its faults clearly now, but I love it not a jot less than I did.

What I want now in the light is what I wanted then in the dark. Groping—puzzled—in the midst of will-o'-the-wisps

F

calling from all sides, I instinctively felt adrift. Yet I was in the very first of English playhouses. There was nothing to catch hold of. There should, of course, have been a school connected with the Lyceum Theatre, a place where those who were beginners could study, could be clearly and slowly trained, directed by masters neither too pedantic nor too go-as-you-please. The only school we had was the stage of the theatre in rehearsal time and during the performances. Just as Irving paid us high salaries from policy, not from principle, so he taught us to go here, move thus, speak so and act, as any other manager does, not with the least intention of making an amazing troupe of actors, but in the hope, the despairing hope, of ever making us more than dummies. He neither showed this despair nor this hope. So that the Lyceum "school" was the old one known as the school of experience. The school of experience is a pretty sound one if you are allowed a great quantity and variety of experiences; that is to say, if you can be in one company to-day, another next month, a third six months later; if the experience is always changing, if you are acting hundreds of parts before several different kinds of audiences in the course of a year, and with as many types of fellow-actors.[1]

But to be year in and year out in the same town, with the same audience, with the same actors, acting one play, is fatal to development. If such a theatre must exist, it can only develop if it has attached to it a school; and a school which inspires, urging the younger workers forward, and which (cautious too) pulls them in—a school which instructs.

[1] During the first two and a half years of his stage life Henry Irving had been given 428 parts to play. This is *the school of experience*—but nothing less than this.

I was not yet seventy-five years old, and no one under seventy-five was allowed to have ideas at that time. It happened also that I was able to escape. This is not the sixteenth century I am writing of, nor the seventeenth, not even the eighteenth. It was the end of the nineteenth century, when little remained to the stage of its old spirit—that creative old spirit; this was in 1896, and the place was England, a place where theatres and playgoing were still considered something wrong and to write real true drama was forbidden. It was a strange period,[1] a period when disbelief was the creed

[1] In 1900 Irving was nearly overwhelmed by a queer fog or pose of commercialism which had settled on our house, of which he, in England, was the head. Instead of ending his life and work in the Lyceum Theatre, he was driven out of it by this mock commercialism. The theatre he had made famous all over the world was taken from him by commercialism; and although he was probably amongst the four best-known and best-loved men in England, neither his friends nor the public seemed to be able to preserve for him his theatre. We lost the actor from the hour he was forced from his old home. It was, to say the least of it, a disgraceful business.

The "just as good" or the "even better" had popped up. "Jones and Smith are just as good as Irving—I think they're better." Only when a nation has become well drugged with lies can it blunder like that about an Irving, for Jones (nor Smith either) never were "just as good," not even "half as good" — nothing in acting was in the same sphere as this actor.

Still, Irving the manager had talked of figures all his life, had staked all on policy instead of principle; whatever he thought, he had always insisted publicly that money and numbers were the sole tests of good work; and now he had begun to ose his money and, losing it, lost his hold of his theatre.

At the same time, in America and on the Continent, the theatre was breaking up. The great actress, Bernhardt, who had defied a thing greater than herself— the *Comédie Française* — had revealed her preference for policy to principle, personal success to the triumph of the principles of dramatic art.

It's not a small matter, this. My quarrel with our house is not, and never has been, about a trifle. Were it so, those of us who are working towards a new theatre could justly be called a pack of pedants.

The immense genius of Bernhardt and Irving as actors we all of us acknowledge. What we grieve for is that they held that their own personal success was not to be won except by a policy which, for a time, hid under clouds some of the best principles of the dramatic art of Europe.

of creeds; when doubt and boredom had already eaten their way into mind and spirit of too many workers in the theatre, when time was preparing to break the old theatre. One hopes such a time is gone by.

Then it was that some few young men and women determined to save the situation. They realised that to do so they would first have to free themselves from the yoke of the theatre, its dear and heavy yoke, a yoke somehow loved because it entailed the privilege of remaining in the old house. This privilege had to be given up.

You do not here need any description of what pain is. You all know what it feels like: you know the pain in the heart. It was this we then encountered when we had to cut free from the old house—yet, I hope, did our duty.

You see, a man of twenty-five or thirty in those days really could not open his mouth except on the condition that he would repeat a catch phrase, an old lie. Originality and sincerity were banned. All was "impossible" in those days; you might speak sense only when too old to remember what it was you had intended to say. "Do as was done last time" was the rule, and a rule not to be broken. A fine principle, to be sure!

Only one thing was left to do, and we did it. By we I mean a few men and women, possibly four or even five: one in England, one in France, one in Germany, one in Switzerland, one in America. We were unknown to each other at the time, and so we worked independently of each other.

But we all heard the cue, all venerated the fine actors

and detested the state of the theatre. What the women did I cannot say; but I know what the men did was this:

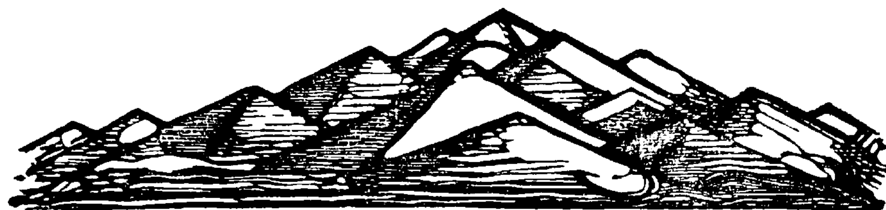
First we swore not to rest till we had made a new theatre, founded on principle not on policy. It is this new theatre we are still making. We are winning and we shall win. We have not yet won. Some there are who would ask us whether what we have done is not enough, whether to have influenced so many thousands of younger artists (and older ones too) is not sufficient victory. It is something, but you misunderstand what happened in 1900 and thereabouts if you think it was so slight a matter to us as that.

What happened was that a challenge, couched in the most paltry terms imaginable, was put before the whole theatrical body, a challenge—an ultimatum: "Starve, or do as is always done." It is paltry in theatrical folk, over-comfortable in their day of success, to challenge the right of the younger brains to wake up the theatre if they can. These same comfortable ones did all they could to prevent our bringing to the theatre of Europe a fresh lease of life, while continuing the policy of "Do as was done last time."

It was so paltry that one was bound to remark it; and so it came about that we swore not to rest until their tenth-rate rule over our ancient home was rendered futile. It is almost futile now. And we look to the young men and women of to-day and to-morrow to see the work finished.

It was then that I came to practise more thoroughly the craft of wood-engraving, or wood-cutting, whichever be the correct term. I found that it was a blessing to be able to turn to this rather difficult craft; teach myself through its slow ways how to design scenes and how to delineate characters better

than I could do in 1896, and how to keep from heart-break, and this it did teach me. It is a work which I found allowed one to listen, if not to speak, while practising it. So I would listen to the novels of Dumas as I worked; and I was wood-cutting some three days out of seven, and listening to Dumas, and planning how to wake up the old theatre.



CHAPTER THREE

WOOD-ENGRAVING has no short cuts—any short-cutting means a slip; it is the most straightforward process known, and I, for one, would say the best process all the world over.

Having drawn on the wood with pencil, I release the pencil with relief and turn to the cutting with confidence. The contact of the steel with the wood brings me to the point. I cut with decision; the wood doesn't yield like the too facile paper. And to cut you need two or three small steel tools; no hammers, no saws, no acids as in etching, and no fiddle and no faddle as in the more complicated processes. All is plain sailing, but hard.

I will not speak here of how you engrave on all the different woods, nor of how you print without the use of a press or even of printer's ink, but will keep to the wood-block cutting and printing of the trade. The printer's trade is a pretty job—even when printing three hundred thousand copies an hour, or whatever the record may be. Still, record making is, politely speaking, the devil. Speed is one of the things which we should be aided to forget. For employing it as we do to-day, we often fail even to arrive in time. As an illustration of this, the following story: Two years ago I entrusted a letter to an air service, one of the

well-known, much-boomed, faster-than-life services in a not exactly slow city. It was all right, only it failed to serve. I had to send a paper to London to be read before a little gathering of about four hundred persons. It was to be read on a Tuesday evening. I took it on the Monday morning at about nine o'clock to the central bureau of this air service and asked what chance I had of its being delivered in London. "The ship leaves at eleven"—I think it was eleven. "Your letter will be delivered at its destination (London, E.C.) before four o'clock this evening." The talk was fine. I paid. I would have paid double or treble to hear such talk from practical people. The idea was immense; the actuality was, alas! a delusion. My paper arrived on the Wednesday following, one day late. But I had not acted like a true believer: faith is so much, and I am sure it was my lack of faith which caused the delay. For I trusted also to the ordinary postal service. I had had a duplicate copy of my lecture typed, and this copy I posted on the Sunday night in the ordinary way and it reached its destination on the Monday. This in no wise detracts from the glorious glitter of the flying machine or the talk, but it illustrates afresh the old fable of the hare and the tortoise, and shows how up to date the fable is, and just how practical so-called practical beings are. Speed should be often valuable—often it is, not always—and in printing it is valuable to "the man in a hurry," to that good joke, that unpretending comedian, the man in the street, who must have his tittle-tattle delivered at his breakfast-table each morning by eight o'clock. Hence the utter confusion, the colossal conundrum of Fleet Street, 1923. There is positively no use in all the tittle-tattle he gets

for his penny. The world, and he, would get along quite as smoothly (who suggests far more smoothly?) without any daily newspapers at all. I was told when last in London that law and order are going to crush Bolshevism by the simple and economic method of suppressing every newspaper in the world. How far this is true I cannot vouch for. It is an idea, anyhow.

But speed in wood-engraving and printing is valueless—for the main idea when you cut a block and print it is that you are in for some enjoyment, and you intend to share it with others. Enjoyment is, surely, never to be hurried over.

When selecting the kind of wood to engrave on, take boxwood. It is hardest and best. Boxwood is to be found in Turkey and in America and England; I have found it in Italy, but I do not know if it grows there; I have merely found part trunks of box trees in wood-turners' shops, bought them and cut and polished my own blocks (see designs Nos. 44, 45, 54, 55). It is not so good as the English wood, but had the advantage of being cheaper, and it was on the spot. A trunk of a box tree is never very large, and so a slice of the trunk does not yield a very large bit for your purpose. That is why they more often than not make a block out of four, five, eight, or even twenty pieces of wood joined together in the most skilful fashion. Suppose a trunk to be like (A) (fig. B) and the four lines I have drawn round it (B) to be the places where you saw off the pieces. Well, when the pieces are lying on the table, they each look like (C). They measure, let us say, two inches by two inches; but out of these four pieces you may at best be able to get only the bits marked off by crossed lines (D). These then have to be sawn out and joined together

(E). Now you have a block about four by five inches, and that is a fair-sized block. It couldn't be larger because, as you see, there was a split at the bottom of each slice and other imperfections, and these prevent us from using all we should like to use of each slice. I have never joined up a block, but the craft can be learned, and it is not likely to be very difficult. When the four small pieces are made into one block, it looks somewhat like (E). But it may be better to buy your blocks ready-made as I did, and as I will now tell you.

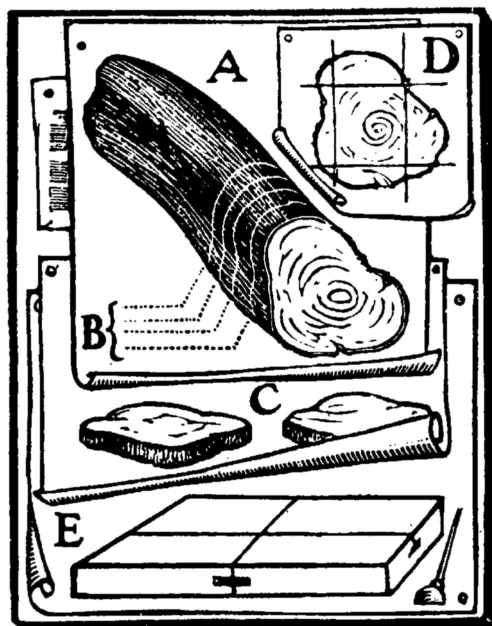


Fig. B

There dwelt in Red Lion Court, at No. 7, Mr. Lacey Evans. He lived on the top floor of this house in the court which runs out of Fleet Street. When I knew him, in 1898 and 1899, he lived by making wood-blocks, mainly those of boxwood, I believe. He made them brand-new, and he remade old ones—made them new too, in his old way. Of his remade stock I bought many a beauty. They were often better wood and always cheaper. I forget now what they cost. One could buy sixty to eighty for what the head of a property stage giant costs. Mr. Evans was a tiny man, very pale, almost white; and in a tiny room packed from floor to ceiling—packed

with many thousands of blocks of every conceivable size, shape and quality, he moved, and he gave me and many others much pleasure through his labour. He only sold the best kind to us, but there was no limit to the heights this best could reach. For ten shillings I could buy eight or ten or fifteen blocks, some big, some small. How it was that the remade ones were cheaper than the brand-new ones was this. A new block is made, as a rule, to be used with type. That is to say, it would more likely be used in the same press and printed at the same time as, let us say, this page of text. You've seen woodcuts in the middle of a page of letterpress. Well then, the block and type must all be the same height or they won't print. If the type (A) (fig. C) is so high, and the block (BB) so high, the ink won't get on the block, the paper won't touch it, and nothing comes of nothing. I cannot here explain the whole craft of printing—besides, most of my readers will know enough to understand what I mean.

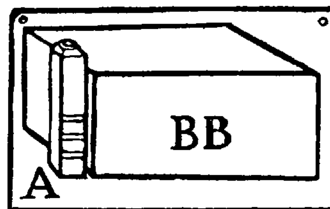


FIG. C

So the blocks are always made as high as the type ("type-high" is the term used), and the regulation height of the type is the height of a shilling when laid flat against the type. So you see the block had to be the height of a shilling also.

Mr. Lacey Evans could do wonders, but not miracles. So when he bought up a thousand old blocks — blocks already engraved on one side—and set out to remake them new for his customers, he would have to do as follows: He would grind down the engraved side until its face was rendered useless and it went out of action. Then he would polish

up the other side (the not engraved side) until it shone like unto fine brass. Then he would sell it to his customers. But in grinding one side down and polishing the other, he had to break the rules of the printing trade. He reduced the height of his blocks from the regulation height of a shilling to—let us say—about three-quarters of an inch.

To use them later in a press with type they would need raising; bits of wood or card or metal would have to be put underneath, and all that takes time and patience, and one doesn't pay twice over for those two adjuncts to the trade.

So old Evans had to reduce his price as he reduced his blocks. Evans grew white doing this, but possibly the miller's-earth pallor which was over him came from association with the many ghosts who must have visited him as he worked, for his was a grave business. Consider it a moment. See him entering No. 7 Red Lion Court as the hour strikes ten, parting from the noise of Fleet Street to enter the silence of this Court of the Red Lion, with a sack of treasure—a sack of woodblocks bought cheaply from someone over at Hoxton. See him stagger upstairs by the light of the moon—ghostly white—sweating, glittering. He pauses on the second landing, and comes to the window. How quiet is the court below! Far off the hum of Fleet Street tells of the living, but Evans with his haul is telling nothing. Evans looks it every bit. He looks into the court and sees there—ghosts. The ghosts which Evans sees are those of the dead engravers who follow on the trail of their box—their great old blocks over which in 1860 or 1869 they have bent, engraving the "Fire at the Olympic" or the "Embarking of Prince Louis Napoleon at Calais Pier." These blocks which were measured once to a lordly *Graphic* page

have now been trapped by Evans, and broken and put into his bag.

Evans is as pale as death by the time he reaches the top floor—and as thirsty. Out of breath, and with barely enough breath at any time to live. But to kill. . . . He opens the door; the counter, three feet from the door, blocks the way. Beyond are pyramids of blocks, behind him are the ghosts. Evans is like an old Egyptian who has rifled the tomb of a king, and who knows something about spooks. But Evans loves his job, so the spooks don't kill Evans outright, he merely fades away. In his tiny room there is barely space for any air. So many lovely blocks are crowded in—he sells rapidly, but at a tiny profit—such work it is all day up there. He fades as he works, does the dear old man. Still, after all, if Nicholson or Ricketts have made but one good engraving on one of the old blocks, the spooks have forgiven Evans long ago. I would often turn over the slabs of boxwood I bought of him after I had brought them home, and try to decipher the subjects and guess at the designers. One had a big balloon on it, and one a tobacconist's trade-mark; and one was Biblical, the great candlestick of the Jews.

It is awful to think of the few stunning designs which we scraped away with the ninety-nine worthless affairs.

Now old Evans is gone, and I often think of him.

CHAPTER FOUR

I HAVE, it seems, engraved in all some five hundred and seventeen woodblocks.[1] I give you here sixty large and some small cuts. Some were made as early as 1895, some as late as 1923; some on boxwood, some on boards. Those on boxwood were done for *The Mask* and *The Page*, two publications of mine. *The Page* was my first bit of a magazine; it started in 1898 and ended in 1901. For *The Page* I engraved about two hundred and thirty boxwood blocks. *The Mask* was begun in 1908, and for it I have engraved about one hundred and thirty boxwood blocks. I published both these journals and wrote some of the text for them. Between the years 1901 and 1903 I made three programmes for the three operas I produced; someone had to see to these things, so I saw to them myself. I practised what I am afraid I may also have preached that stage-managers should do, engraved the designs for these my own programmes. For two of them, rather—for I had also to give some hours a day to rehearsing the actors, designing, and in some cases painting, the scenes, designing and seeing to the costumes, and, with my friend Martin Shaw, getting together the few hundred pounds which the whole thing would come to cost. These programmes are rare to-day. That for *Dido and*

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[1] A list is being made for me by a friend.

Æneas for 1900, in its first state, is in warm brown paper wrappers with nine printed pages, a loose addenda sheet, and fourteen engravings; that for the same opera and *The Masque of Love* in 1901, a second state (enlarged) of the first programme, has eleven printed pages and fourteen woodcuts, four half-tone plates and one pen drawing, and is bound in dark grey paper wrappers. The first programme (1900) is, I believe, to-day worth many a shilling to collectors and the second worth almost as many. Then came *Acis and Galatea*, with a revival of *The Masque of Love*. This programme or "souvenir" consisted of fourteen pages of text, one page of music, nine colour plates, and ten half-tone plates. There is an essay by Mr. Fuller Maitland, the text of the opera by Mr. John Gay, an essay by Mr. Barclay Squire, and the story of the *Masque* by Christopher St. John. What this is worth I don't know, for I have never seen a copy advertised for sale in any catalogue.

In 1902–3 I produced a play called *Bethlehem*. For this I engraved a few costume figures—two or three, I fancy—but did not use them in any programme (fig. 21). I had not the control of the printing, or you may be sure I should have done something. In the same year I was engaged to produce part of a music drama called *Sword and Song*. For this I engraved one block. I give it here (fig. 20). It was done to guide the scene-painter. I had not my own painting-room or I should have been my own scene-painter. A four-leaf trade programme was issued by the management for which I was working. In 1903 I produced *The Vikings* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. This time I felt that my task was sufficient without adding wood-engraving to it. I made some fifty or so drawings and

some hundred sketches, working, as the theatre-folk in those days had to work—all day and nearly all night—for months, rehearsing a charming company, who acted so well that everyone remembers their performances; my *mise en scène* is forgotten, I think. It was praised by a few, patronised by a few more, and allowed to drift out of the English theatre. So I take it I was a little before my time, a very careless thing to be; after this I was out of work for many months.

At the end of 1904 I went to Germany. There, while producing one or two plays, I began again to wood-engrave a little. This time, and for the first time in my life, I was really encouraged. These are the facts—it is time to state them. Whereas previously I had been forced by the indifference, or, what is worse, the condescension of my countrymen, to engrave for myself, the Germans, being different rather than indifferent, asked me to engrave for them. At least, one German did; so, you see, one Englishman would have been enough to have helped me. My German gave me a great deal of money—what I asked—to engrave five blocks. Why had no Englishman done that? I asked myself.

You can imagine how real an encouragement this was to me, and since it was such a good thing I do think that a few men in England deserve that I should explain why. Once they understand, perhaps others may come to understand. In any case, may I suggest that the employment of English artists should not be left to foreigners. All this happened twenty years ago, and I suppose doesn't matter. If it be happening to-day to young artists, then it matters very much.

He was a stranger, one who liked good books, good printing, and liked them new. To him, while old books of the

thirteenth or third century were good, books of the day were even better.

He was not a sentimentalist. I never felt that when he was asking me to do the work he was aware that I was in any way benefiting. He was doing as he did, first, because he wished to make more attractive an already very attractive play; secondly, because it would be published by a very excellent publisher whom he, as a private gentleman, wished to see the foremost publisher in Germany; and thirdly, because this would be so much definitely to the credit of German art and enterprise.

He was a German. When an Englishman will do as much for the work of the young artists of England as he did for the work of the artists of Germany, France and England, a duty will be accomplished which is now being shirked. I fear that my words may have suggested that this German was a dilettante. My friend was immensely energetic. All the time he went unceasingly here and there, placing sums of money in one branch of art after another. Wood-engraving—Painting—the Stage — Publishing — Printing — Type-cutting — Paper-making—Literature—Sculpture—Music—there was nothing in the Arts that he missed. He attacked and braced up all these things by the sole means in his power; not by a little occasional burst of anxious sympathy and dabbling in them himself, but by a trim personal attention given to seeing them braced up.

For him I made, in 1905, these five woodcuts, four of which were published by the Insel Verlag in Leipzig in 1907. At the same time, for myself, I designed and cut a cover device for my first book or booklet, *The Art of the Theatre*, published in England by Foulis and Co. in 1905, in Berlin by Seemann Nachfolger, and a year later in Holland by

S. L. van Looy, Amsterdam. To this Dutch edition I added ten more small woodcuts.

But it was only in 1907, when I first came to Italy, that I began to engrave again to the same extent as I had done in 1898. After eighteen to twenty etchings done rapidly in 1907, I turned to the woodcut once more with doubled enjoyment. One of the first cuts I made in 1907 is fig. 23 of this book, and I made it after my first twelve etchings had been produced.[1]

Italy helped me this time: Italy has helped me ever since. Not in money, for Italy is poor; not in its Press, for Italy is unaware that I exist; but in unusual ways incredible to the sceptical and not to be told here, for it is too long a story.

I went in 1907 to Florence, not for fun, but to work. *The Mask* began to shape in 1907; it was printed in Florence.

The Mask appeared in 1908; it went on till 1915.[2] Before long it began to succeed. I had the enjoyable task of engraving the blocks as well as writing what little I wrote.

A third of what I wrote at this time is to be found in *On the Art of the Theatre*, and I engraved some fifty out of my five hundred and seventeen blocks while writing the book.

These few facts are recorded here, lest anyone imagine that to be in Italy is, for me, to be at all idle.

And the prize I received for my work was a medal. As it is a curious medal which only the engraver can get, those of us

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[1] These etchings have now been reproduced by English collotype craftsmen working for the Oxford University Press, and published in 1923 under the title of *Scene*.

[2] It recommenced in 1918; one volume came out: it stopped again. It has started once more this year, 1923, with the purpose to stop no more.

who have it are a bit proud of it. It is worn on the hand, and yet it is not of gold nor a ring. It is a bump—nothing handsome. It is fixed on the palm of the right hand in a straight line below the third finger. Diamonds and pearls are not so rare.

FIGURE I 1898

FIGURE 2 1898

FIGURE 3 1898

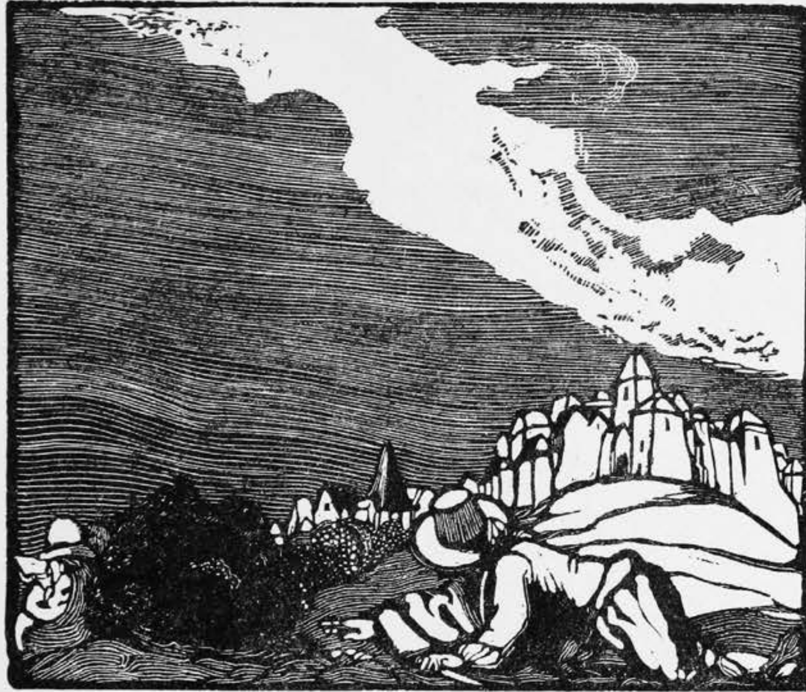


FIGURE 4 1898

FIGURE 5A 1898

FIGURE 5B 1898

FIGURE 5C 1898

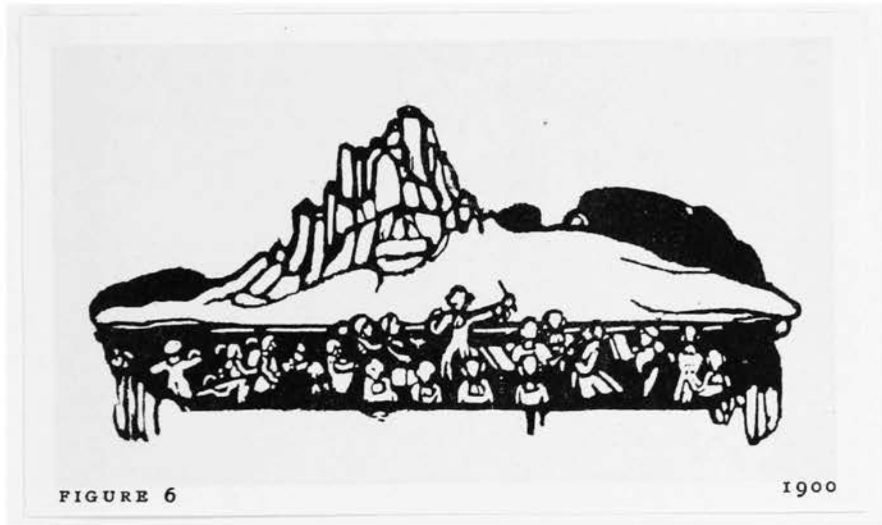


FIGURE 6 1900

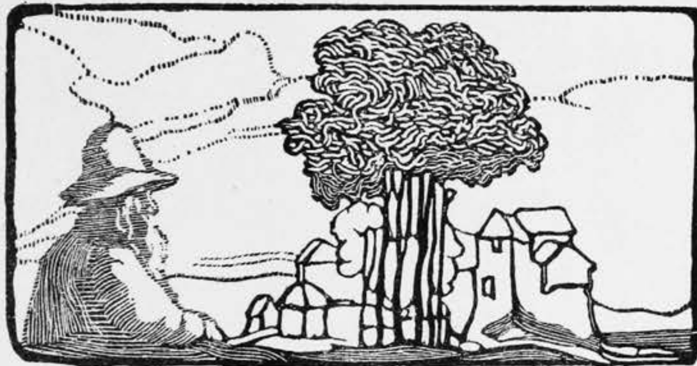


FIGURE 7 1898

FIGURE 8 1899

FIGURE 9 1899

FIGURE 10 1899

FIGURE II 1899

FIGURE 12 1900

FIGURE 13 1900

FIGURE 14 1900

FIGURE 15 1900

FIGURE 16 1900

FIGURE 17 1900

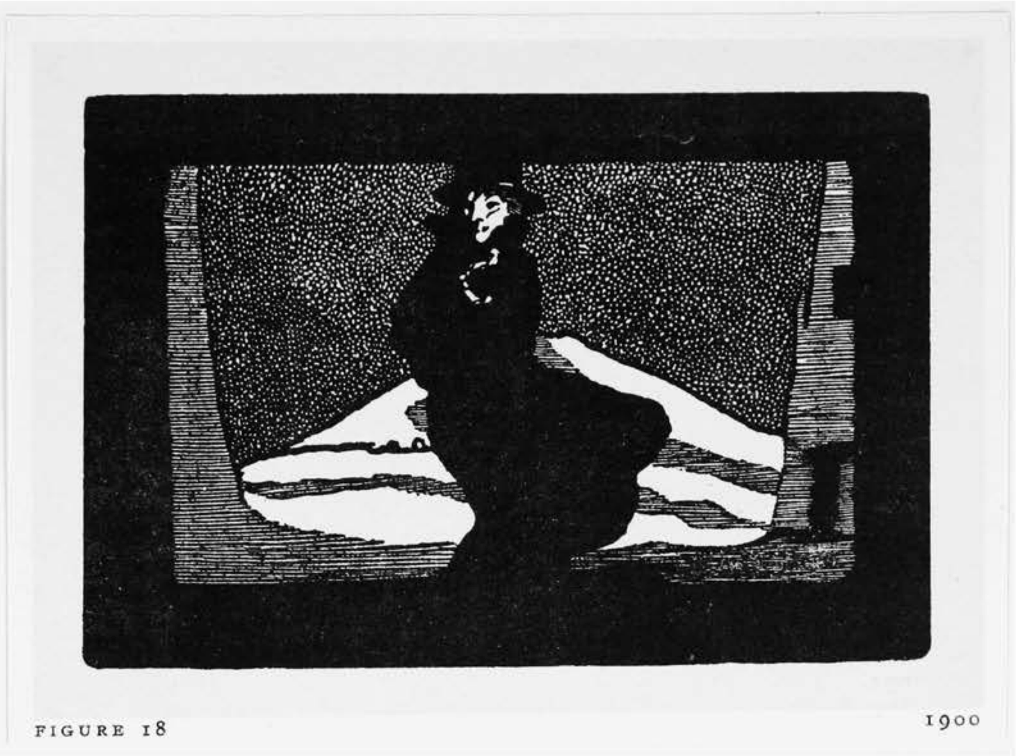


FIGURE 18 1900

FIGURE 19 1900

FIGURE 20 1903

FIGURE 21 1903

FIGURE 22 1901

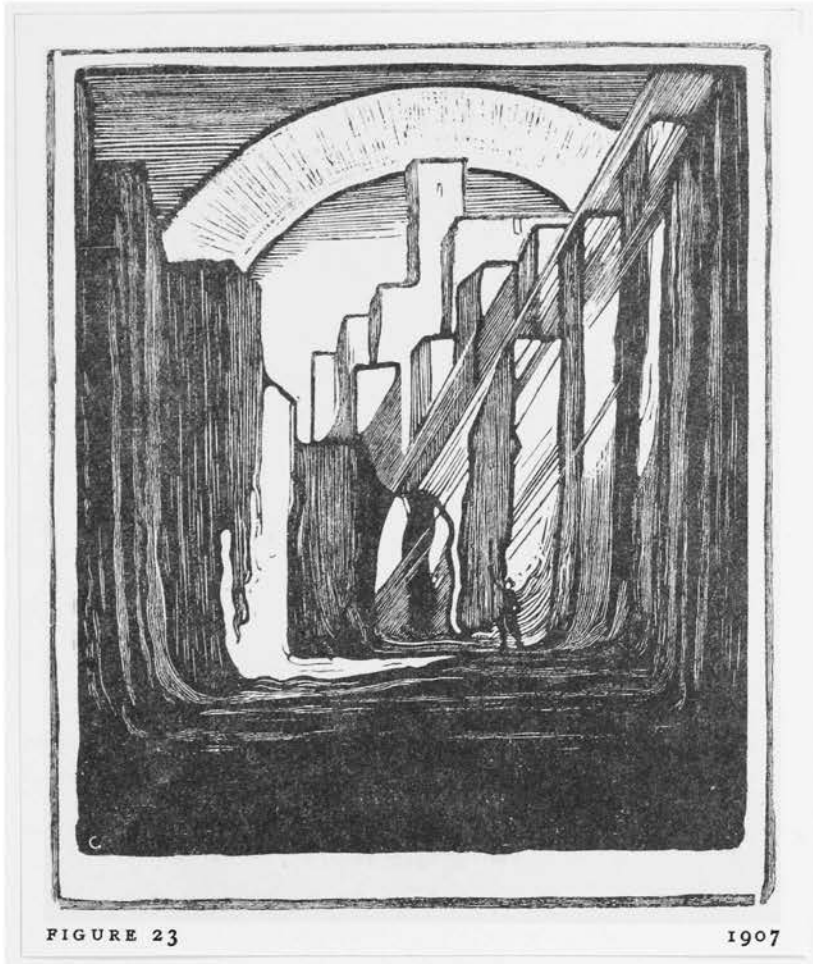


FIGURE 23 1907

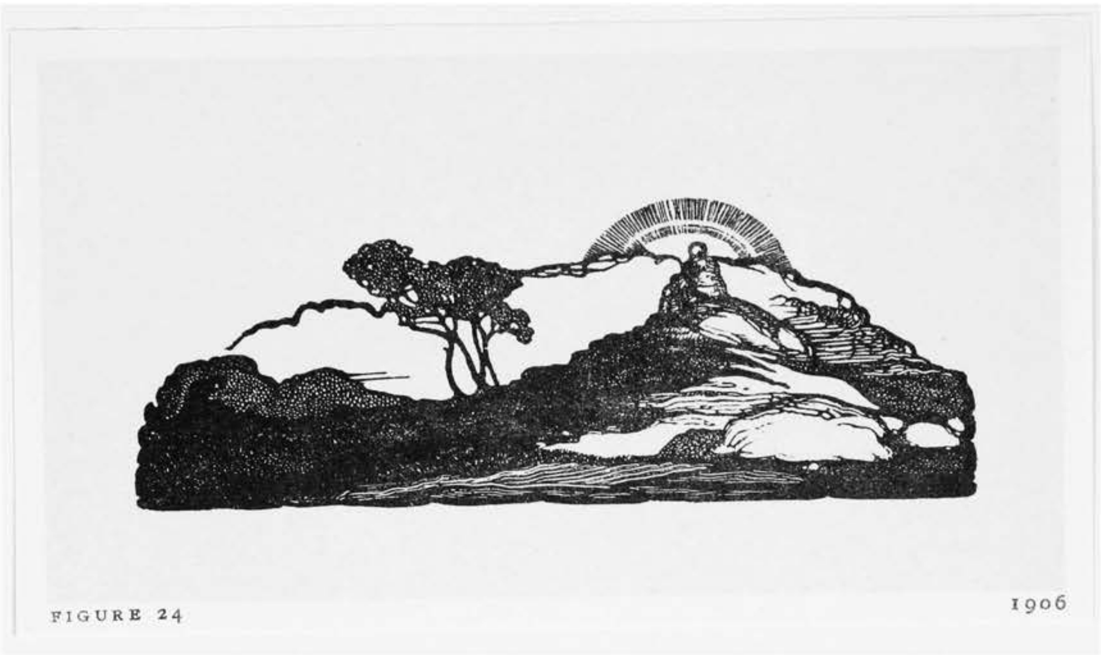


FIGURE 24 1906

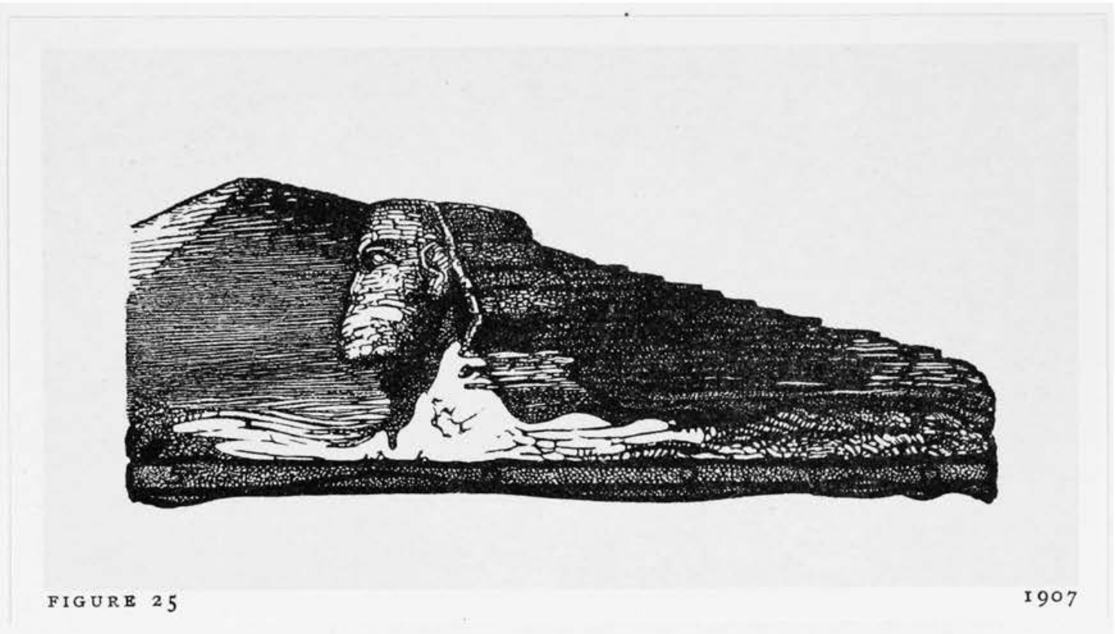


FIGURE 25 1907

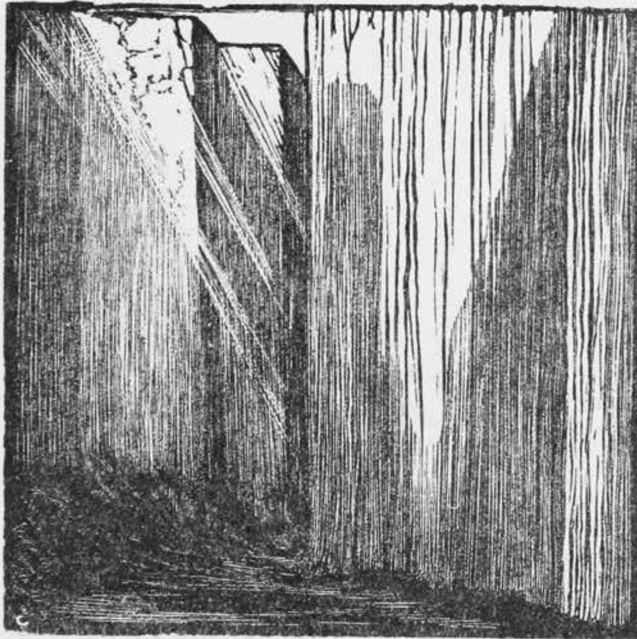


FIGURE 26 1907

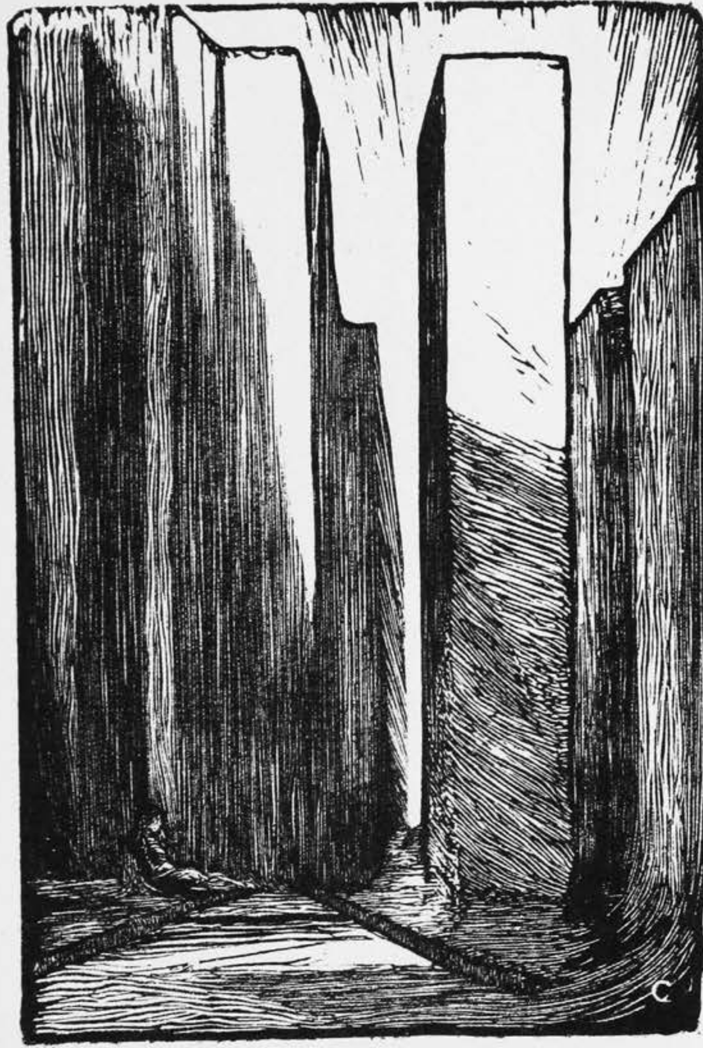


FIGURE 27 1908

FIGURE 28 1907

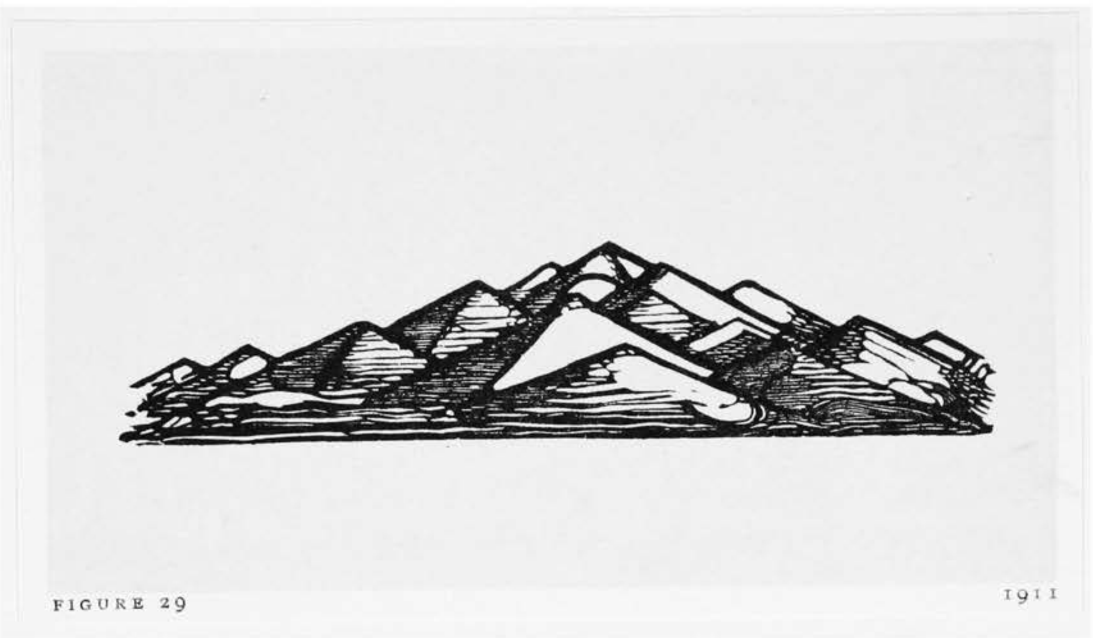


FIGURE 29 1911

FIGURE 30 1907

FIGURE 31 1908

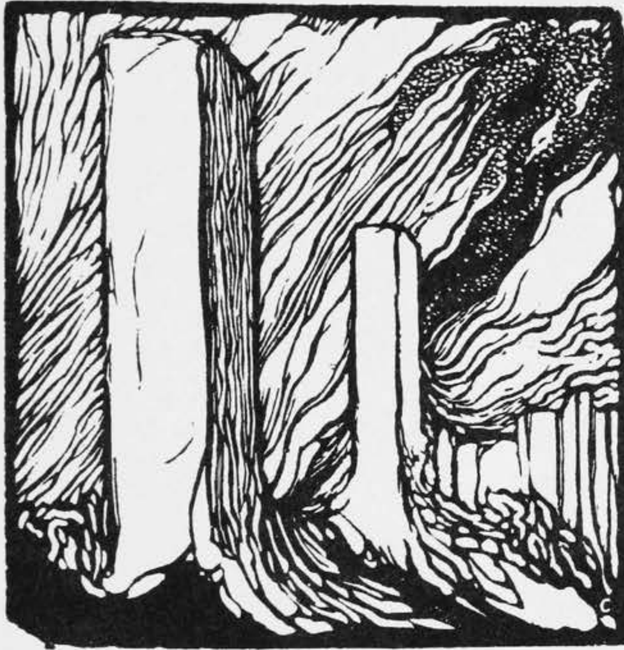


FIGURE 32 1908

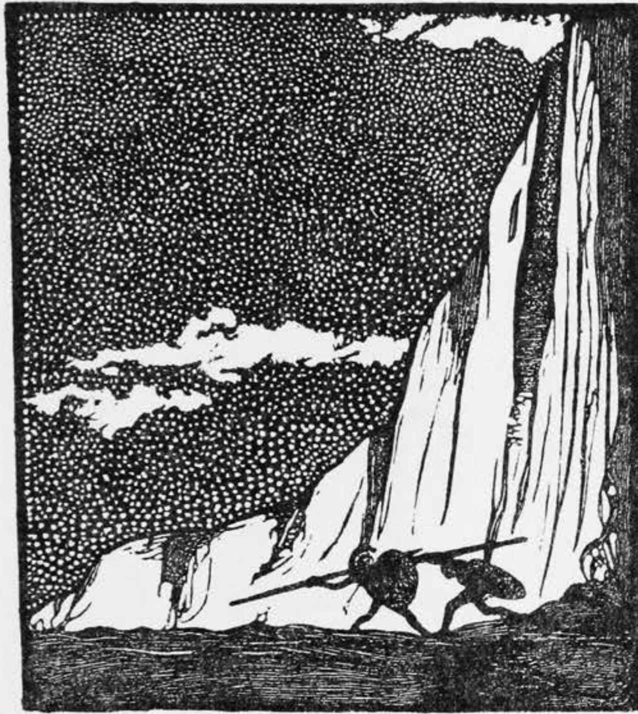


FIGURE 33 1908

FIGURE 34 1908

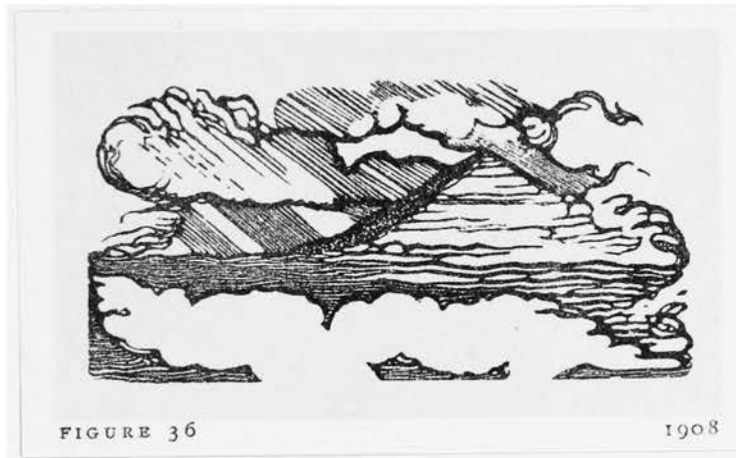


FIGURE 36 1908

FIGURE 37 1910

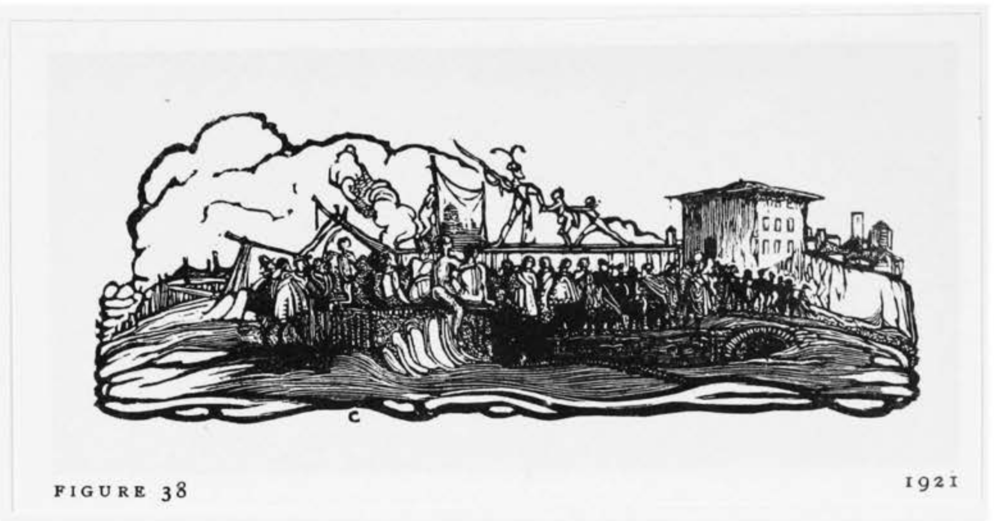


FIGURE 38 1921

FIGURE 39 1908

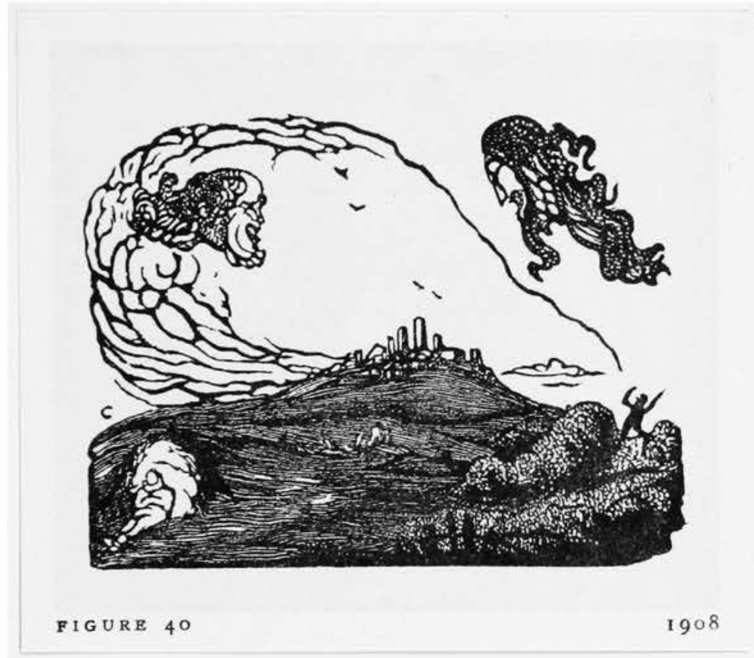


FIGURE 40 1908

FIGURE 41 1908

FIGURE 42 1908

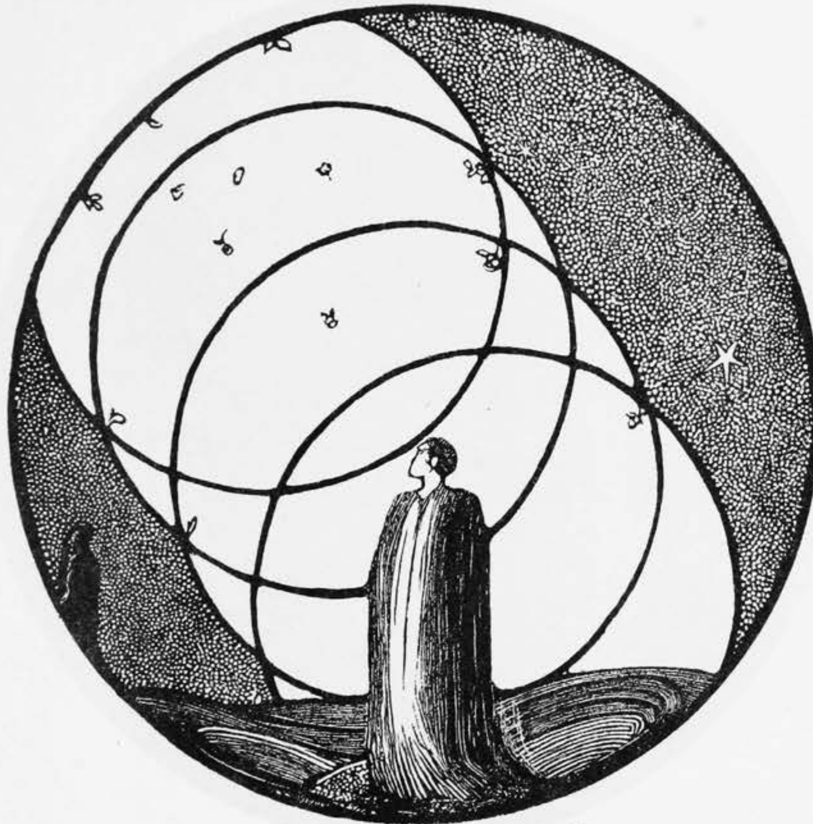


FIGURE 43 1908

FIGURE 44 1908

FIGURE 45
(STATE I)

1908

FIGURE 46 1908

FIGURE 47 1909

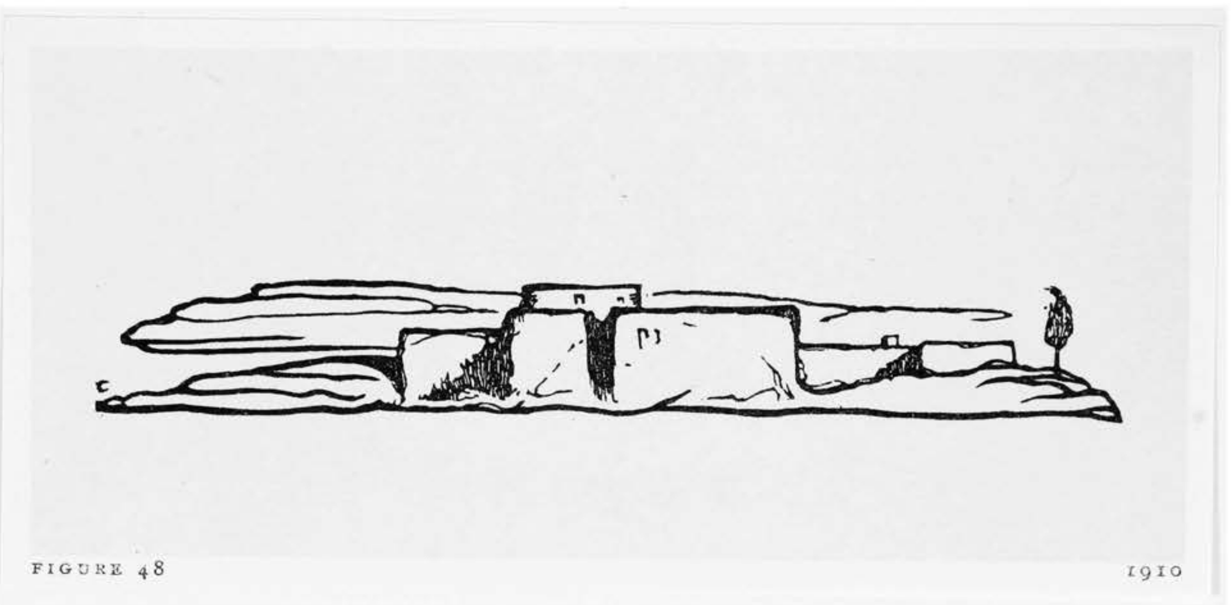


FIGURE 48 1910

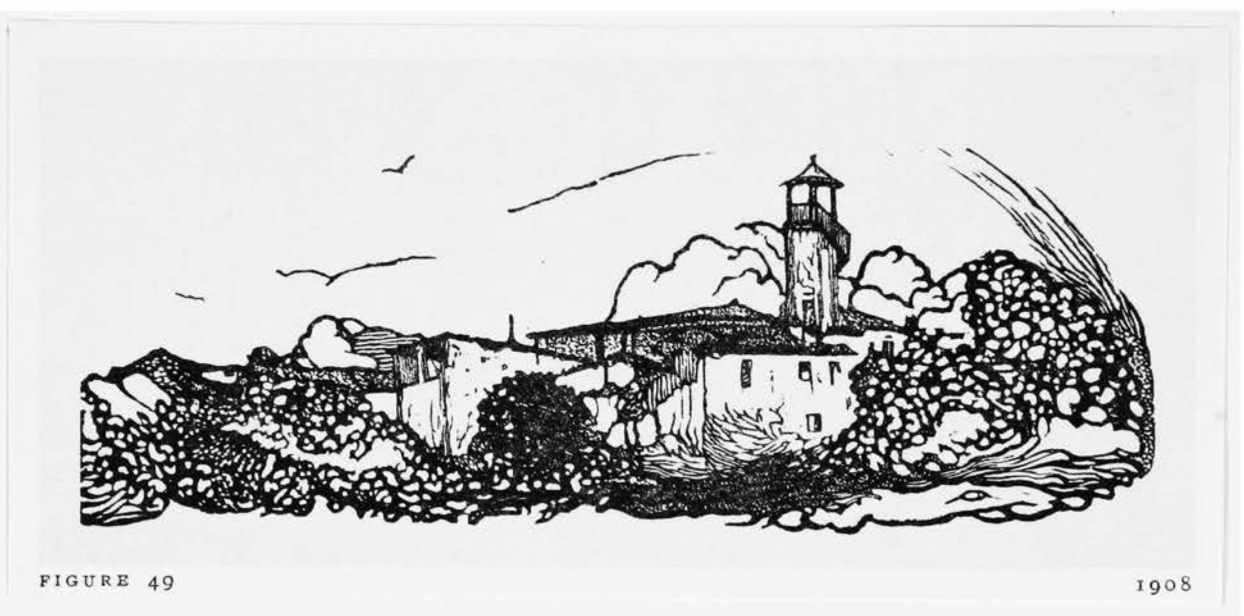


FIGURE 49 1908

FIGURE 50 1908

FIGURE 51 1908

FIGURE 52 1908

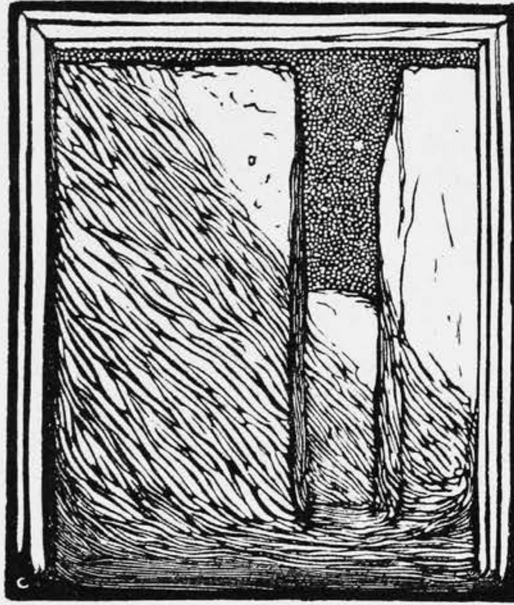


FIGURE 53 1909

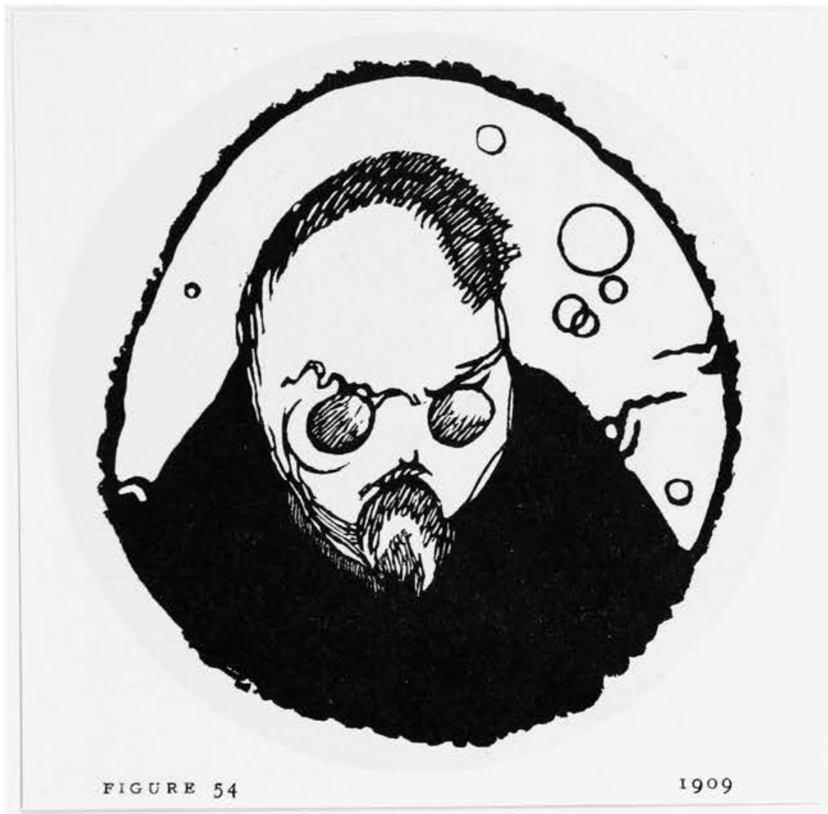


FIGURE 54 1909

FIGURE 55 1911

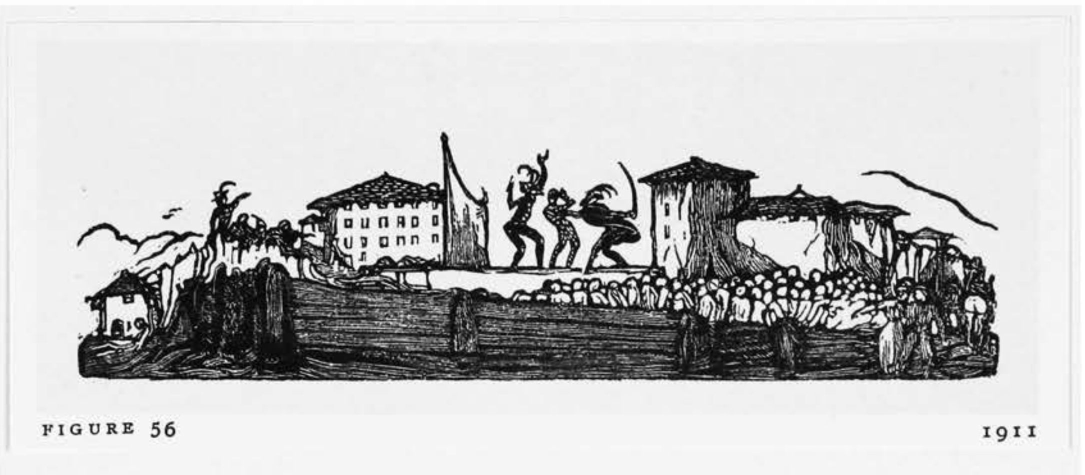


FIGURE 56 1911

FIGURE 57
(STATE 2)

1920

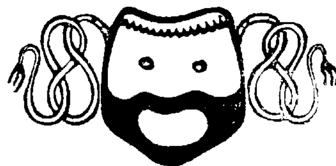
FIGURE 58 1913

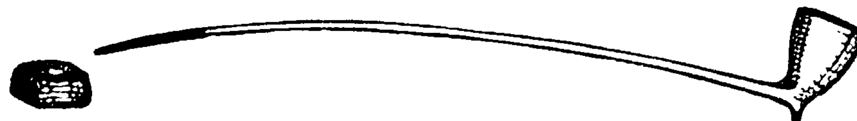
LIST OF WOODCUTS DESIGNED AND ENGRAVED BY THE AUTHOR BETWEEN THE YEARS 1895 AND 1923

Year	Number	Year	Number
1895	6	1908	71
1896	2	1909	32
1897	1	1910	39
1898	72	1911	17
1899	87	1912	33
1900	41	1913	9
1901	36	1914	11
1902	4	1915	2
1903	7	1918	2
1904	5	1919	4
1905	2	1920	1
1906	12	1921	3
1907	16	1923	2

¶ The original prints of most of the woodcuts reproduced in this book are to be seen in the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

¶ Copies of these original prints from the wood can be obtained from *The Mask* Publishers, Box 444, Florence, Italy. They are rather larger than the reproductions in this book, and each copy is printed by hand on Japanese paper, and numbered and signed by the artist.





SOMETHING USEFUL, I HOPE

THERE be some who tell us that to wood-engrave is to attempt "a more difficult way of doing something that could be done easily," and that "pen-and-ink drawing will achieve all that our forefathers aimed at in the woodcut." This is seen to be an error as soon as you look at a pen-and-ink drawing of to-day; for it neither achieves what our forefathers achieved when they drew with a pen, nor at all what they achieved in wood-engraving. The pen drawings and wood-engravings in the New York, London, and Milano collections are at our service to prove this.

It is not actually very difficult to engrave on wood. Were it difficult, it would be a poor process and it would never have become as popular as it became and remained for many hundred years. For it was the most popular process once upon a time, and thousands of men engraved on wood, some badly, some well—some very well. Their engravings, even those plain line blocks such as the designs to *Æsop's Fables* printed in 1480, in Milano, the *Valturius* of Verona, 1472, the *Biblia Latina* of Venezia, 1499, or the Joseph Crawhall engravings of 1880, are utterly unlike pen drawings. They are so to me, at least.

Those who say that wood-engraving is a long way round for arriving at what a pen can do, mean commercial matters. They mean that when Mr. John Swain reproduced by wood-engraving John Leach's famous "Peasantry on their way to an Irish Fair," poor Swain had to sweat twice as much as Mr.

Henschel or Mr. Swan, who later came to make photographic reproductions of the work of Mr. Pennell and his later school of penmanship. And even this has yet to be proved.

They also mean (and here they are quite correct) that to use wood-engraving to *interpret a wash drawing* is to take the difficult way instead of the easy way. Judging from the examples we possess of this sort of work, it would seem that it is also the wrong way. It really does not matter which is easy and which difficult. For suppose a way to be the more difficult way and yet the most successful, the mere difficulty will not overwhelm us. It is only when we take immense difficulty to achieve failure, even though we be successful commercially, that we say the method is bad, the road the wrong one.

This engraving of tints so smooth that one could hardly see the cuts of the graver is what they achieved in the nineteenth century. The finest of such work was called "delicate" work. The broader came to be considered the work which an amateur could, without much trouble, teach himself. "Delicate" work seemed to be the holy of holies; broad work was considered as nothing. It was not the public who decided this for us, it was the craftsmen; those craftsmen who had to copy on wood some design by Benjamin West, by John Martin, or by Hogarth and a hundred other painters. This is a thing no one should have ever been given to do, there being better ways of reproducing such pictures, but not cheaper ways; and there comes the trouble. It was, as I have said, for commercial reasons that wood-engraving reached to such popularity as it did in the nineteenth century.

The world had to have a picture of "Prince Albert landing at Dover Pier." It had to be about a foot and a quarter by a

foot large, and it had to look as photographic as possible: real sky, real waves, real wood of the pier, real sea-gulls and clouds, real rain, mist, or whatever there happened to be on that day.

Nothing at all like this was ever attempted in the old days when they wished to record any event, such as the entry of Louis XI. into Rheims in 1462. But if you start by letting the wrong man say what is wanted, and then let him put on men to do the wrong job in order to bring us a thing we neither want nor need, not only a whole craft and a whole art can be wrecked, but a whole world too.

It's distinctly jolly for the wrong man at the beginning, but it's hard luck on the right men at the end. It might have been cheaper to reverse the matter, to have made such laws that would have prevented a great donkey from controlling such a power as wood-engraving became when allied with the Press if he was so utterly unable to control it.

This is one of the things artists talk about in their studios from century to century. They have a wee bit of wit which belongs to their race, and which is other than other people's wisdom. I am tired of seeing Shelley's assertion that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." God forbid that poets and other artists should be allowed to muddle such a thing as legislation. But they do voice the opinion of the ordinary man of common sense when they say that you should not employ the wrong man to set tasks for the whole world. This is such an everyday bit of common sense, this and like notions which the man in the street and the artist have in common; and the very eccentric dreamers, though much greater men in Empire Government, should try to acquire it.

It is not surprising that everybody is now and again

grieved to see this one point utterly disregarded by mighty Prime Ministers and almost as mighty a Press.

And so for some sixty or seventy years—I don't know exactly how long—we had preposterous wood-engraving, and now we have a ruined craft and young men are rebuilding it.

It was not so as to interpret nonsense that fine artists such as Altdorfer, Bewick, Blake, Calvert, William Harvey, Millet and W. H. Brooks, Crawhall and Vallotton once engraved; and Nicholson and Charles Ricketts, who have both engraved marvellous things; and Sturge Moore (to me ever delightful and successful), Shannon, Savage (a born wood-engraver), Pissaro (another), Paul and John Nash, Strang and Gibbings, Lee, Sleigh, Brangwyn, Wadsworth, Gill, Mrs. Raverat, Mrs. Garnett[1] and some hundred others, still engrave. They do it because they like the medium for their own ideas, and some have handled it, or can handle it, brilliantly; others, if less brilliantly, very admirably.

We must abide by what these men hold about wood-cutting. You don't suppose that Nicholson is going to sit down and engrave a large block of Turner's "Ulysses defying Polyphemus." I believe he could do it, but I fancy he has not yet done it; nor is it likely that he would even sit down and engrave a block interpreting one of his own still-life paintings. For wood-engraving was not made for the purpose of copying other works of art. Wood-engraving is a medium for creating a new work of art, a little one or a big one.

There have been, however, a few interpreters who were fortunate in possessing the talent of the born translator. For

[1] And in Finland the gifted Ellen Thesleff; in France, Maillol and Gampert; in Italy, Sensani and de Carolis; in Germany, Fritz Endell.

example, do you know the works of the engravers Paillard, Dete, Tinayre, Noel, and Bellenger (*circa* 1890)? These interpreted the work of other men, and I doubt whether any machine could interpret as they did. For they did not copy, they interpreted faithfully, speaking in a way in which only the graver and scooper can speak, not mechanically — faithfully, yet freely, from one language to another.

Do you know their illustrations to *Le Théâtre*, by Sarcy (1893)? I have it before me: The lovely use of white touches on black in the trifle on page 50, which shows us "La Colonne Morris"—most excellent M. Paillard! The tail-piece on page 59 by M. Dete—it is out of the question that a pen could do what is done there. Let anyone try, put it to the test.

It is not difficult to detect the pen line from the wood-cut line. A pen line, more often than not, has a certain loose drag or flick about it. A similar line in the wood-cut is far more deliberate and is cleaner. When there are a quantity of lines together, you will see that those of the pen lack all the deliberation of the engraved line.[1]

Vierge, who is held to be the greatest pen draughtsman we have had, made drawings with the pen, with immense and unnecessary pains, to be engraved line for line. Some of these engravings are merely mechanical copies and are, of course, "a more difficult way of doing" what a photographic process can do so very easily. It is always a mere copy unless the engraver adds something of his own to the design, something worth having, and which nothing else but

[1] I do not speak of the pen line which the eccentric engraver sometimes imitates, nor the engraved line which the eccentric pen draughtsman also sometimes imitates, for these could deceive anyone—being made just to deceive. I refer solely to the genuine in each branch of work.

one of the tools can give. This is done by M. Allouis in his engraving of one of Vierge's drawings for "L'homme qui rit" (English version, 1889, vol. ii. page 61). I hold that Paillard and Dete did this, too, and also he who cut the little blocks used to illustrate the *History of Napoleon*, by R. H. Horne (1841). On pages 34, 55, 101, 129 of this history, and the smaller of the two designs on page 109, volume i., I find blocks which are very good—but the name of the engraver has faded—I can hardly trace it—is it H. Lavoignat?

Raffet was the designer. When a nobody engraved one of Raffet's designs, it lost almost everything; when M. Lavoignat engraved them, something specially beautiful is added to them.

The nineteenth century, having laid down the law that any broad work on wood was beneath contempt, that it was a thing that "an amateur could, without much trouble, teach himself," it followed that so as to avoid being thought to be an amateur, broad wood engraving was shunned.

But since broad wood-engraving is, in truth, the best part of genuine wood-engraving, it came about that wood-engraving died out, and to-day is so little known that people believe that it would need some extra magic to bring it to life again.

I have no doubt that our wood-engraving of to-day is looked on by some fine old disciple of the school 1840–50 as very laughable and ridiculous; just as we see to-day that the brilliant scenic work of the young men is looked on with silent disdain by the disciples of the utterly bad scene painting of the past. Only bad in this: that they attempted to do what should never be attempted. Their offence is that they offend common sense.

So when anybody tells you it is difficult to wood-engrave,

do not entirely believe them. It may not be as easy as strolling down a country lane, but it is not half as difficult as, for example, typewriting and stenography.

But it is quite other than these, and it is of no use for you to learn to master the very few difficulties of wood-engraving, if you have nothing to say when you have mastered them. But that does not render it any more difficult than any other craft; for in singing (and singing is a craft, not an art) suppose yourself gifted with a divine voice, and suppose after three years at Milano or Paris, you came to master all the difficulties of voice production, even then it is of no use to you, and it is of no use to nine-tenths of those who own such voices and who master the rules, if you have nothing to express. And so, *the* main difficulty in wood-engraving is to know if you have anything to express, and to find out how long you can retain your original intention of expression.

I have said that American and Turkey box trees yield the largest slices of wood, but that English boxwood, though much smaller, is the best. The Turkey boxwood is rather full of cracks, because when they cut down the trees, they do it so carelessly, that as the trees give up the ghost and strike the ground, a shudder runs through them, and cracks the wood from top to bottom. The smaller English trees are more easily cut down, and are handled with greater care.

The English boxwood is also harder, firmer, and does not crumble as you cut it. Crumbling means that when you cut a line with the graver on a poor piece of boxwood, it breaks along the edge as though you were cutting on a block of salt, does not cut slickly as though you were cutting butter. A good

piece of boxwood should cut like butter. It is sufficiently moist, even when quite dry; when over-dry, it will begin to crumble.

In order not to let them get too dry you must not keep your blocks too long shut away from the air, although you must not keep them in any place that is at all damp. Should your wood become over-dry, there are two ways to bring it to itself again. They are as follow: Put the block into a deep earthenware pot like the Italian oil jars, in which for some unknown reason people plant orange trees. Place this in a very cool corner for about ten hours. If the wood is too dry for this to have any result, place the block in water, on its back, in a shallow dish, the water to surround the block one-sixteenth of an inch deep. Leave it there for an hour or rather less.

In selecting your boxwood, remember that the best pieces are of the same tone all over, and that tone a good yellow. This good yellow boxwood will withstand the effects of the spirits of turpentine which, later on, you must use to clean away the ink, whereas the boxwood from Turkey and America will drink up the turpentine and this, in time, will have a bad effect on the block. They say that the wood of apple, pear, and beech trees have been used for engraving, but I would advise you to keep to the boxwood, for the one great advantage that it possesses is that the worm cannot eat it. You had better not eat it either, for it is somewhat poisonous. People who have seen chips lying about while they were working, and nibbled at them, have become ill. A rabbit, once playing . . . but enough.

So much for the block itself.

Now for the drawing on it. I have already told you that I only sketch very roughly the thing I am going to engrave, and then make variations in the design as I cut, following no hard-and-fast outline, or anything else. I merely catch at opportunities as I go along. But other people do very differently.

The surface of a block is generally as polished as ivory, and so it should be; but some men, when they come to draw on the block, remove this polish in the following manner. With a little powdered bath brick and a very little water mixed, they rub the smooth surface of the block. When this is dry, they rub it away with the palm of the hand, removing all the powder that may be there, so that their pencilled lines may not suffer by encountering specks of grit. All you are wanting to do is to make the surface of the block more easily drawn on. Other artists will use another method of preparing the surface, which is to mix flake white and gum water and lay it thinly on the block and let it dry. When dry it becomes dead white. Be careful not to put too much flake white in the mixture. I myself cannot use either of these two processes because it seems to me that I destroy some of the nature of the block. And, strange as it may seem, it is the nature of the block which urges me on and helps me. Were I to turn it into what looks like a piece of white paper, I should quite lose my head. As it is more than likely that you feel like this too, I can assure you that you needn't fear that something is going wrong.

What you might do is to rub the rather too smooth surface of the block with a clean but well-worn piece of india-rubber.

Rub as hard as you like, as though rubbing out a drawing. This takes off some of the superfluous shine.

In drawing on the plain block without any preparation on it, you cannot do better than to use the pencil which is known as the Leighton pencil made by Wolff and Son. It is not too soft, and it is not too hard, and, I regret, not too cheap. I have found that a B or a BB is better than an HB for the block; because, when you draw on the block you must not scratch or press too hard, for that makes a dent in the wood and this can affect the print later on. You had best be careful not to smudge the drawing with your hands, as you pass them over and around the block while cutting; and if you breathe too heavily on your block while cutting, it will make your pencil lines more liable to smudge. But common sense will guide you in these matters, and it is unnecessary to terrify you with a lot more warnings, as to what you should not do.

Having drawn on your block, you now engrave it—with what? May I suggest with as few tools as possible. There are several kinds of tools. These are called gravers, gouges, chisels, tint, and, I think, something called a sculptor. What I believe you will need is a graver and a gouge to begin with. Don't get any more. If you do, you won't know what to do with them. Whereas if you don't, you'll soon know what you want. I can't say what you will want, but for your first gouge and your first graver get a medium-sized gouge and a small graver. I don't know if Mr. Buck in Tottenham Court Road still keeps these engraving tools, but it was at his house that I found most of mine, and two of my best. They supply handles for these

which add to their length—what this length should be depends on the size of your hand. I have a good-sized hand. It measures exactly eight inches from the first line around the wrist to the tip of the middle finger, and is four inches wide. The tool I like best to hold measures exactly five inches. When I am holding it in position, one-half inch extends beyond my first finger, which I use for the top of the tool and to keep it steady. My thumb and second finger serve as steadiers on each side of it. This does not mean to say that you grip the tool with all three fingers as in the clutch of a drowning man. The fingers just hang around there attentively and help things along, the main thing being to keep the point of the tool steady. The handle rests in the palm of the hand—but I shall never be able to explain by words exactly where it does rest, so I give you a plan of my hand (page 39). The spot marked by a small circle is the place where the handle rests. That is the spot which presses the handle and moves it. It is not by strength of fingers that you move it; it is by the weight of the arm. The fingers only guide.

And the small circle is the medal I have already told you of.

Anyone with smaller hands will, I suppose, use rather smaller tools. Don't be troubled about not being able to get each tool exactly the same size, for it does not matter, but bear in mind that it is best that they should not protrude more than half an inch beyond the reach of your finger when in the position of cutting.

And get some wood engraver to show you this way of holding the tool.

Now you have the block and the tools, and you've drawn

on your block. Is there anything else you want before you begin to cut?

I believe it is usual to have what is called a sand bag on which to rest your block; and a globe with water in it; but I have never been able to bring myself to get these things. I used to find, however, that it was good to rest my block on something besides the table, and so I used a book. But a book without a cover, or a nice old eighteenth-century leather-covered one, something with a little give to it. Or I would bundle up a handkerchief beneath the block. At any rate, I would generally begin cutting in this way with something to keep the block from slipping; but as things grew fast and furious, everything would be pushed aside so that I could keep the block easily turning. For turning it helps you when you wish to curve your line a little. You turn the point of your tool—but you turn the block too—at least I do.

The light should come from the window at your left, or, if you work at night, from a lamp in front of you, with a shade throwing the light down on the block. You can't work unless the light is thrown down on the block.

And I think you're now ready to begin.

I will suppose you to make some design on the wood, and not that you will commence with fifty straight lines as an exercise. You make some design, then; and whatever is black on the design is to be left untouched; whatever is white is to be cut away. The chief thing you have to do is to hold your block tight with your left hand so that as you cut—and the cutting is a stiff process—you do not slip and

send the tool, with the full force of your right arm, into one of the fingers of the other hand. For, if you do this, it is possible that you may take a great dislike to wood engraving. This is quite one of the most difficult things to avoid doing, and you won't avoid it for a long time. So—keep the fingers of your left hand out of the way. Whatever direction you see the point of the graver or gouge going in, keep the fingers out of the way. Then try and cut the "ditch" (that is, the white space) so as to leave the line or black space just the shape you wish it to be.

Suppose you draw the letter X and the figure 8 as your first exercise. A nice big X and a nice big 8. You'll have an amusing exercise which will show you whether it is more difficult to cut straight lines, or curved ones. I have chosen these figures because when you print from your block they will come out all right. I mean they will not come out backwards. For an X is an X, and an 8 is an 8, whichever way you hold it, or, if painted on glass, from whichever side of the glass you view it.[1]

If you want to make your X and 8 more elaborate, put a square round the first and a circle round the second. If still more elaborate, put two squares and two circles. If you want to draw a good circle, use a shilling, a half-crown (best to borrow this like all practical people do), an egg-cup, or a saucer. Don't waste any time trying to be Giotto.

Now, supposing from this first exercise you go on success-

[1] If you are later on going to cut letters, take my advice and write on a card and put it up in front of you, REVERSE THE LETTERS. I have cut many a block and smiled at it with pride, and then discovered that I had cut all the lettering forwards.

fully for a few weeks or months, until you come to create a really good design which you think needs watching, while adding a piece here, or taking a piece away there; you'll wish to see some result, you'll want to print a proof, and the text-books say you cannot do that until the whole work is complete. This is not true, and I give you an example of a block of my own in the three states, to show that you can do this.

After you've taken your first proof,[1] you may be so inspired that you can decide straight away that such and such a piece of wood must go, certain lines of black spaces must be altered or removed, and that others are all right as they are. Or you may prefer to pin it up for a day and look at it now and again and cut it when you feel fresher. Were I you, I should not be in a hurry to cut, however inspired you may feel, because you can't put back a line unless you "plug" the block. That means to say you sink a well into the block and you fill it up with a piece of wood. A very difficult business, I should imagine. It seems so difficult that I have never attempted it, and I shall never come to think that any sixteenth part of an inch of my design is worth that amount of trouble.

A good thing to remember about boxwood is that if you find the tool, though sharp, doesn't cut cleanly, let us say from east to west, twist the block round, and cut from west to east. All along the road, the main thing to remember

[1] To pull proofs you need a dabber, a white tile, a pot of printers' ink (keep from the air), a flat ivory or wooden paperknife, and thin paper. You put a little ink on the tile, you dab it about forty or fifty times all over the tile till it's flat; you then dab the face of the block with it. You then place the block on the table, lay a piece of thin paper on it (white tissue paper will do), then, holding the paper and block absolutely steady so that the paper cannot possibly slip, you rub the flat of the paperknife on it as though taking a rubbing from a brass. Then remove the paper slowly and look at the result. If an inexact impression, take another pull.

is the wood, and anticipate that all sorts of things may happen. There is no good lecturing the wood and insisting on its changing its nature; for, after all, it is not as variable as man, nor as hard, and it only wants a very little understanding to manage it. But don't put it in the sun and expect it not to suffer, don't leave it in the damp and show surprise when it warps, don't let the surface get greasy and show surprise that the ink won't adhere. In fact, forget yourself entirely —think only of the wood, and all will be well.

A word now to save you slipping on the wood, and otherwise marking the wood by accident. Look at fig. 5A, which I call "D'Artagnan's Man," and imagine yourself cutting away that piece of white between his stick and his breeches. You will run the tool down the side of the stick and down the side of the breeches. But you must be careful how you remove all that waste ground between those two lines, and your best thing is generally to cut towards the line or "ditch" that you've made, so that your gouge at each thrust is stopped by the ditch.

I give you here a little block (fig. D) showing you something like that portion in the "D'Artagnan's Man" block. You will see the two white lines cut down on each side of the stick, and you will see the crinkly line down the side of the breeches. Now look at the little line of dots which runs down the middle. When you want to clear away all this black middle part, the point of the tool must be on one of those dots and you must cut towards one of the ditches. We will now cut towards the ditch by the

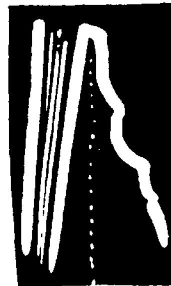


FIG. D

Fig. E

side of the stick (see fig. E). Now we will cut towards the ditch by the side of the breeches (see fig. F). That leaves a certain number of black dots in the middle (fig. F). These you remove by going from north to south (Fig. G). The purpose of all this is to avoid indenting the edge of the stick or the breeches. Fig. H shows the indentation. Those distinct marks which you see down the side of the edge of the stick and the indistinct ones on the edge of the breeches are caused by the back of the tool pressing on the wood. That is not good unless you expressly want such marks to show; and then this will explain to you how to do it without any effort.

Fig. F

You will see in many of the wood-engravings of the nineteenth century a number of the lines cross-hatched. I was never able to achieve proper cross-hatching because I never saw any use for it, though I played with it once (see fig. 10). It seems to me to be only really useful in etching; it was after having found it useful there, *I suppose*, that the studios passed it on to one another, and the wood-engravers brought it into their own craft. If I were you, I shouldn't bother about cross-hatching. You know, of course, that cross-hatching means black lines crossing one another. The old text-books devote many pages to this same cross-hatching. Let us hope

Fig. G

Fig. H

that some day one wood-engraver will use it brilliantly, and then all our dislike for it will have to vanish.[1]

The question as to how much black you should allow in a wood-block, how much white, and how much grey, is one that I cannot answer. The black as used by Vallotton or Nicholson or Crawhall is gay enough for me—perfectly glorious! but it would have depressed Mr. Ruskin beyond all words.

You will find what Mr. Ruskin wrote about this use of black at the beginning of this book, and you will find, on the same page, what Odilon Redon wrote. I take it Ruskin had been looking at some of the engravings by the men of 1860 and 1870 when he got so cross about the black, because it is all nonsense to say that the "eye is greatly saddened and offended by quantity of black," in the work of the masters, old or new—and the old masters were very fond of it.

And yet there is something mighty true about old Ruskin's "nonsense." I think so because when I was in Moscow in 1909 I went to see a play by Andreieff called *Life of a Man*. It began in black, and it ended in black, but I didn't stay till the end. I went out in the middle of the second act, feeling ill.

The scene was composed of some big black velvet curtains, and on these had been either sewn or drawn certain white lines, representing the perspective lines of the ceiling, floor, and the four walls. Against these were placed tables and chairs which had been painted white, and the people were dressed so as to look like outline drawings. I asked one of the stage

[1] I learn, since this was written, that Miss Clemence Housman *has* used it brilliantly.

managers why this was done. He told me it was done so as to achieve something Aubrey Beardsley had achieved in his black and white drawing when he used a white line on a black background (I give you a picture of this scene, fig. I. There were some eight to ten scenes like it).

I am glad I am alive and able to tell you all this, but I am certain that Mr. Ruskin would have died. For to have a space of about thirty-six square feet of blackness in front of you, with those awful white lines to emphasise the blackness, and to emphasise the stupidity of an attempt to represent an enlarged black and white drawing on the stage, is to kill you in the ordinary way if you're a serious person; and to make you die of laughter if you refuse to take it seriously. But I think a black and white drawing is a very different thing, and I cannot feel that the black is offensive, but am entirely of Odilon Redon's opinion.

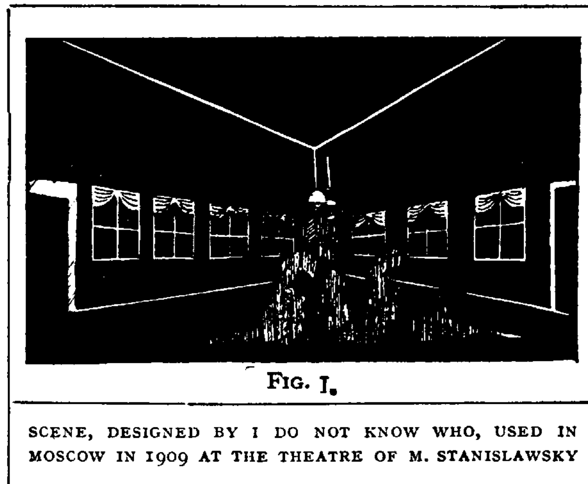


FIG. I.

SCENE, DESIGNED BY I DO NOT KNOW WHO, USED IN MOSCOW IN 1909 AT THE THEATRE OF M. STANISLAWSKY

If I have an ideal in wood-engraving it is to make my black lines and my white spaces so equal in their strength that a strong grey is achieved. And I would like my black line to be about as thick as the capital letter I used on this page. It is for this reason that, if the artist be allowed

to have a special fancy for any of his blocks, mine is for that little block which represents a pyramid (fig. 36).

If you ask the advice of some wood-cutter to start you going, as I hope you will, he will probably tell you not to tip the point of your tool too deep in the block, and not to tip it too high, that in your progress you suddenly slip.

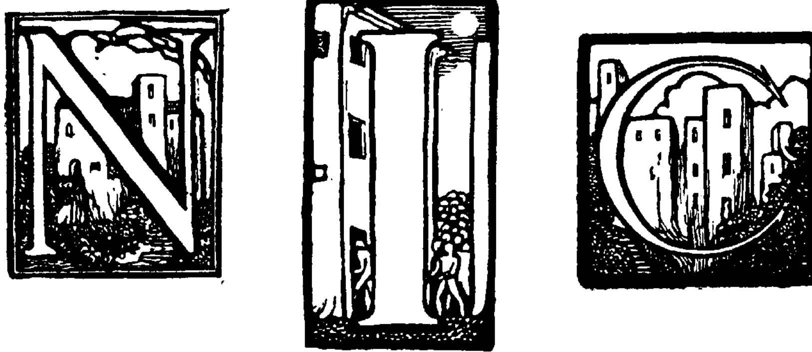
How to hold the tool; how to hold the block; how not to dip or rise; these are things you can learn in half an hour if you will pay attention and if you have a friend who will show you for the first ten minutes, and watch you blundering for twenty, and help you twenty times.

And it is because this is all you have to learn, that I say it is not difficult to wood-engrave. Then you practise for two or four or ten years, and perhaps you may engrave some blocks that are delightful.

And now about the printing. Since you don't need to bother yourself about this at first, the best thing to do when you decide to begin wood-cutting is to discover a little printer nearby who has a small hand press. You'd better take him the paper, and let it be fairly smooth; not greasy and not too thick. Get him to damp it slightly and then ask him to make one light imprint and one very heavy imprint. The heavy one will show you what has yet to be cut away.

You will see on figs. 5B and 5C, "D'Artagnan's Man," some black marks between the stick and the breeches which had no business to be there. That means that I did not cut that white space deep enough. Figs. 5B and 5C are proofs of the block before it was finished. In fig. 5A, a later print of the same block, you will see they have gone.

I think you should be very careful to tell the printer to use black ink, or brown ink if you prefer it, although it is difficult to get a good brown. Sometimes printers come out with a choice Prussian blue which is enough to knock the heart out of anybody except Mr. Ruskin.



One of the best early designs for you to practise on are initial letters; because you can draw your letters and put in behind them a few trees, a castle or a pattern, as a background, or little figures, or anything you like without feeling that you have to make a masterpiece right away. I believe that it is rather easier to begin with a letter composed of right angles than a curved one. An O is very difficult, an S by no means easy; but a T, an I, an N or an H will not discourage you. You can leave your letters black, or you can do as I have done in some of the initial letters here, you can pick the black out. But leave it black to begin with and pick it out after your first proof. But don't be in a hurry to cut away anything, and I don't think you can tell yourself

this too often. Leave more folds in a dress, more marks in a face, more bars in a fence, more curls in smoke, than you finally come to need, because there is no great hurry, and you can always cut out later on, whereas you cannot put them back—at least not easily.

While on this point, remember to have two or three proofs taken of your block in its first state, then take a sharp knife and cut away from one of the proof copies (one of the prints) anything that you may fancy would improve it to be gone. When you've done this and so as to test the full effect of this, lay it on a sheet of paper of exactly the same tone and texture as the paper on which the proof is printed. Compare the altered copy with one of the other proofs; don't be in a hurry, and what you think wants cutting away from the block, cut away to-morrow.

You must take care that the paper has no grit in it. I have printed so many of mine with grit that I know this. I preferred an ordinary paper to a very refined one, but there should be ordinary papers that have no coal in them. Mine had coal, and stone, pieces of bark—a most extraordinary paper.

I used it for a book of mine once, published privately; originally called *A Book of Penny Toys*, the title of which I was forced to change to the egotistical tune of *Gordon Craig's Book of Penny Toys*, because I had been foolish enough to issue one of the designs in a journal under the title *From The Book of Penny Toys*, and did not copyright the title. Somebody took it within twelve months.

My book I was forced to print privately. There were five hundred copies, I think, two hundred and fifty of which I burned. It pleased me to think I burned them, for, if I

hadn't, I should have had to colour them all by hand. Two hundred I did colour with the aid of one or two of my friends; and each book had about forty plates, each plate two to four colours.

I may republish this book some day, if it's wanted; certainly not until it's wanted. Meantime if one is ever to be found in a Charing Cross Road bookshop, it is generally lost before one can secure it.

WAS there any need for this last part of the book? It is added, of course, for those who know nothing about the craft; and I hope if any beginner finds it as useful to them as all Nicholson's advice was to me, they will not forget to let me know sooner or later.