

EXHIBITION OF WOOD ENGRAVING

BY

HENRY WOLF, N. A.



· March 26th to April 11th, 1910

HENRY WOLF

It has been said with authority that if an art lover were anxious to publish a book and have it artistically illustrated with wood engravings, there is only one man* in America today who could do it for him! It is with a great deal of pleasure, coupled with a seemly amount of self-congratulation, that the Detroit Museum of Art offers for a few days' public exhibition proofs of engravings done on wood by this "one man"—Mr. Henry Wolf, N.A.—and loaned by him from his own portfolio.

Mr. Wolf was born in Eckwersheim, Alsace, August 3, 1852, and at the age of fifteen went to Strasburg to study in the school of Arts and Crafts. There he met the wood engraver, Jacques Levy, and through him was attracted to the art and at the same time he sought to perfect his drawing by becoming a pupil of Emile Schweitzer. In 1871 he came to America, and the end of the next year saw him settled in the city of New York, where he has been content to live and work, a citizen of the United States by adoption.

During the eighties and early nineties "American wood engraving, of which he was the flower, astonished the world by reason of its excellence," and for the first time Europe looked to the United States for an art and proceeded to follow it. Under the patronage of the Century and Harper's magazines great strides were made, not only in the intelligent handling of the burin but in perfecting the printing process, and in improving the quality of paper to be printed upon.

But the work was slow and costly. Photographic processes had already made their appearance, and with the discovery of the "half tone" process, which could reproduce drawings and photographs in one-twentieth of the time in which the wood engraver could do it, with a relative reduction in cost, wood engraving at its most brilliant period was dealt a death blow. As the newer method of reproduction gained in popularity, the men who had worked side by side with Mr. Wolf turned, one after another, to other and more

Mr. Timothy Cole, our other American wood engraver, has lived and worked for the past twenty-six years in Europe.

CATALOGUE

- 1 Woman at the Window, after Vermeer.
- 2 Boy with a Sword, after Manet.
- 3 Don Balthazar Carlos, after Velasquez.
- 4 Portrait of a Girl, after de Predis.
- 5 Thomas Carlyle, after Whistler.
- 6 My Mother, after Whistler.
- 7 Miss Alexander, after Whistler.
- 8 Little Lady Sophie of Soho, after Whistler.
- 9 Mr. Jean Léon Gérôme.
- 10 Sir Henry Irving.
- 11 William T. Evans, Esq., after Jongers.
- 12 Robert Louis Stevenson.
- 13 Mr. Joseph Pulitzer, after Sargent.
- 14 Thomas Jefferson, after Charles Wilson Peale.
- 15 Beatrice d'Este, after Leonardo da Vinci.
- 16 The Engraver Henry Wolf, after Irving R. Wiles.
- 17 Spanish Girl, after Velasquez.
- 18 George Washington. after Gilbert Stuart.
- 19 Judge Jones, after Gilbert Stuart.
- 20 Hon. Joseph H. Choate, after Sargent.
- 21 James C. Carter, Esq., after Sargent.
- 22 Girl with Parrot, after Sargent.
- 23 Portrait of a Man, after Lenbach.
- 24 Portrait of Mrs. Creelman, after Shannon.
- 25 Portrait of a Lady, after Irving R. Wiles.
- 26 Lady with a Lute, after Vermeer.
- 27 New England Peddler, after Eastman Johnson .

humorous fame to be appreciated.* Already his prints are in the great collections of Europe and America—the Villia Doria at Rome, the Ecole au Livre at Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, at the Murée Municipal, Strasburg, Alsace, at the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, Buffalo, New York, at the John Herron Art Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana, and many others, Budapest Museum, Congressional Library, New York Public Library, etc., and in many private collections.

On the occasion of his receiving a medal at the Exposition des Beaux Arts, Rouen in 1903, an art critic of that city said: "Mr. Henry Wolf is perhaps the first wood engraver of the world. He possesses a delicacy of burin that hardly allows the execution to be seen; while the suppleness of his graving is such that his proofs might easily be mistaken for paintings in *grisaille*"—a delicate gray. Truly, as Mrs. Chandler says in her appreciation of the master wood engraver, "by some subtle magnetic power he catches the very *feeling* of the painter, and, through his own fine soul and touch, transmits it to us. While the lines in his prints do not fail to preserve the outward appearance of the original, they fairly vibrate with sympathetic desire to make us know the very spirit of the painting."

In the present collection one has ample opportunity to study the engraver's interpretation of paintings by men like Chase, Weir, Sargent, Alexander, Shannon, etc., men still living and whose work is peculiarly associated with this country, as well as Leonardo da Vinci, Velasquez, Vermeer, Manet, and our own Whistler. And finally, certainly not least in point of interest, are Mr. Wolf's four originals—"The Evening Star," "The Morning Star," "A Scene in Lexington, N. Y.," and "Morning Mists." Surely one may say, with small fear of contradiction, that here at last is a painter-wood-engraver.

*Mr. Wolf was accorded an Honorable Mention at the Salon, Paris, in 1888; a gold medal at the Salon in 1895; an Honorable Mention at the Exposition-Universelle, Paris, 1889; a medal at the World's Fair, Chicago, 1893; a silver medal at the Exposition-Universelle, Paris, 1900; a silver medal at the Exposition des Beaux Arts at Rouen in 1903; and a diploma and grand Medal of Honor at the Universal Exposition at St. Louis in 1904, "awarded by the International Superior Jury for his distinguished services for the advancement of the art of wood engraving." He has served as a member of the American National Juries of Selection for the Paris Exposition of 1889 and 1900; of the juries of selection and recompense for the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, 1901, and similar juries for the Universal Exposition, St. Louis, 1904.

lucrative branches of art expression, and he alone remained with box-wood before him and graver in hand striving to express those things, and doing those works, which only time and posterity can truly reward.

In an article, "The Rise and Decline of Wood Engraving," written by Mr. Wolf, he says: "To engrave a painting is quite different from reproducing a drawing in black and white. Here you have the values before you, the engraver needs only to render them. In the painting there are many colors—relative values that must be taken into consideration—the harmony must be rendered. Oftentimes the painting is very large; the engraving is sometimes in proportion to it as one to a hundred. . . . In such cases the engraver has to eliminate, keeping the eyes on the essential parts, in order not to overcharge the engraving with unnecessary details.

"The wood cutter of Durer's time reproduced simple facsimile. This required only patience and a steady hand, but little thought. The modern wood engraver has to render tone, light, shade, atmosphere, texture in lines that must be improvised to suit the details of the subject. It requires deep study; the engraver has to calculate how much wood to take out of the block, how much to leave untouched, in order to reproduce in black and white the relative values and the effect of a drawing or painting. The engraver has to be an artist. His art is difficult, the technique is hard to master; he has to practice a great many years till he knows his material. As the engraver proceeds on his block he cannot see the effect of his work as does the draughtsman, the painter, the sculptor; all he sees are colorless lines and stipple. By his experience only is he able to calculate and see in his mind how the variety of lines will look when printed on the paper. Every line, every dot has to be reckoned with—each one must contribute to the harmonious whole.

"An untouched plate would print black; lines or stipple cut out with the graver remain white. The graver's means are stipple, line, and cross line; with these elements he has to run the whole gamut from black to white to reproduce a painting, whether landscape, genre or portrait."

But it must not be thought Mr. Wolf must wait for post-

CATALOGUE--Continued

- 28 The Music Room, after Whistler.
- 29 Shipwrecked Sailor, after Howard Pyle.
- 30 A Quiet Hour, after John W. Alexander.
- 31 Girl with Mirror, after Irving R. Wiles.
- 32 In the Adirondacks, after Wyant.
- 33 The Roadside, after R. Swain Gifford.
- 34 The Woodgatherers, after George Inness.
- 35 Information, after Meissonier.
- 36 A Mousmée, after Robert Blum.
- 37 A Flower, after John W. Alexander.
- 38 A Gentlewoman, after J. Alden Weir.
- 39 A Canal in Artois, France, after Cazin.
- 40 Le Crépuscule, after Alexander Harrison.
- 41 The Evening Star; original engraving by Henry Wolf.
- 42 The Morning Star; original engraving by Henry Wolf.
- 43 A Scene in Lexington, N. Y.; original engraving by Henry Wolf.
- 44 Morning Mists; original engraving by Henry Wolf.
- 45 Day Dreams, after Thomas Couture.