

This selection, conveying with it the masterly omission of all that is not specially essential to the conception, results in work of the highest value, a frank summary of the artist's impression, a vivid concentration in free, firm lines of the salient aspects of the subject.

It may be well to bear in mind that, apart from the high qualities of temperament and natural aptitude necessary in the artist, and the technical obstacles referred to, the manipulation of the plate presents difficulties only to be overcome by delicate skill and judgment, attained by long experience. A short description of the treatment of the plate will best explain these difficulties.

A metal plate, generally copper, is covered with a thin coat of blackened varnish, known as etching ground; through this the artist sketches in his design, laying bare the plate at each stroke. The acid is then applied and eats into the plate wherever exposed by the touch of the needle. If variation of tone and a difference of force in the lines is required, the more delicate portions of the sketch are "stopped out," that is, covered by varnish, so that they shall not be affected by any subsequent exposure to the acid, which is again applied; and so on, until the plate is completed. After the acid has performed its work, and the plate has been thoroughly cleaned, it is ready for the printer, unless the artist sees fit to finish or enrich his work with "dry point," that is, to cut directly into the bare plate, thus raising a little ridge of metal or "burr," which holds the ink and gives a strong effect.

The printing of a fine plate also demands delicate skill and judgment, and its success rests very largely in the experience of the printer. For the printing, different materials are used in order to obtain the best possible effect, both as regards the subject and the manner in which the plate is worked. We find papers of every variation of hardness or softness, vellum, parchment, and sometimes satin; and in general the material is somewhat of a guide to the condition of the etching, as any care shewn in the selection of the material should indicate a desirable condition of the plate.