Methods in the art of taxidermy

Davie Oliver
Title: Methods in the art of taxidermy

Author: Davie Oliver

This is an exact replica of a book. The book reprint was manually improved by a team of professionals, as opposed to automatic/OCR processes used by some companies. However, the book may still have imperfections such as missing pages, poor pictures, errant marks, etc. that were a part of the original text. We appreciate your understanding of the imperfections which can not be improved, and hope you will enjoy reading this book.
METHODS IN THE ART OF TAXIDERMY,
BY OLIVER DAVIE,
AUTHOR OF "NESTS AND EGGS OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS," ETC.

NINETY FULL-PAGE ENGRAVINGS, CHIEFLY DRAWN BY
THEODORE JASPER, A.M., M.D.

THE WHOLE CONTAINING FIVE HUNDRED FIGURES CLEARLY
ILLUSTRATING THE MODES OF PROCEDURE IN THE ART,
TOGETHER WITH EXAMPLES OF CHARACTERISTIC FORMS
AND ATTITUDES OF VARIOUS SPECIES OF THE ANIMAL KING-
DOM. INCLUDING REPRODUCTIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF
ACTUAL WORK BY AMERICAN TAXIDERMISTS.

PHILADELPHIA
DAVID MCKAY, PUBLISHER
1022 MARKET STREET
Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1894,
BY OLIVER DAVIE,
In the Office of the Librarian, at Washington, D.C.

Copyright, 1894, by DAVID McKAY.

12096

PRESS OF
PREFACE.

In April, 1882, my artist delivered to me the first drawings intended for this work. As specimens were procured from time to time, from which to make illustrations of the various procedures in the skinning and mounting of animals, the progress was continued until the present volume is the consummation of our efforts. We have likewise incorporated some reproductions from photographs of actual work by American taxidermists. All scientific technicalities which could possibly be avoided have been omitted in the text. Our aim has been to produce a work amply illustrating the various modes of procedure in the art of taxidermy, intended especially to instruct the beginner. Those who are experienced in the art may also be aided by some new and practical methods which we have included within these pages.

We have not followed any established order of zoological classification in the arrangement of the chapters, but have taken up the practical lessons on birds first, because they usually give the most satisfactory results to the beginner. The mammals, which are more difficult, come next in order and, lastly, the complicated preparations of crustaceans, fishes, reptiles, etc.

Acknowledgements are due the New York Engraving and Printing Co. for the faithful reproduction of my artist's work, and for the skill and care displayed in the printing of the plates.

239 West Tenth Avenue,
January 10, 1894,
Columbus, O.  

Oliver Davis
HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

It is not my intention to elaborate on the history of a subject whose life has been so short and uneventful as that of the art of taxidermy. Our "great lights" in the art are few, and if we cannot point to examples as ancient as those which immortalize the grandeur of other arts, it may be because its objects in their very nature are perishable. If there were any early attempts in the art, the subjects must have been so inartistic and unnatural looking while they lasted that they were perhaps regarded as curious, but as works of art were probably never recognized and were never recorded in history, tradition, poetry or song, and, meteor-like, their rays were soon lost in the firmament of the fixed planets of other arts whose light will continue to shine for all time. Were the examples as desirable as those of sculpture or painting, we should be able to trace their history to very remote periods.

If the mounting of the skins of vertebrate animals to appear life-like was carried on in ancient times, we have no evidence as to the quality of the work or by whom it was done.

An old narrative of the Carthaginian navigator, Hanno, has been verified through extensive research, and that portion relating to the original discovery of the gorilla may possibly have a bearing on the question of the antiquity of our art. By this record, five hundred years before the Christian era this old voyager recorded the capture of gorillas and the preservation of their skins; or, as the record has it, "we killed and skinned them, and conveyed their skins to Carthage." History also relates that these skins were preserved in the temple of Astarte, where they remained until the taking of the city in the year 146 before Christ, as stated by Pliny, who called them Gorgones.

From this, however, we cannot infer that these specimens were mounted or arranged to represent life-like attitudes, but simply that the skins were preserved. If our art is of ancient date, we have no relics of it, as we find in the other arts, as lasting as those of Grecian sculpture, which date back as far as the eighth century B.C. The famous Lion Gate at Mycense is supposed to be even older. We have no monuments in our art that defy the march of time like the bronze Discobolus of Myron, yet to be seen in the Vatican at Rome, and many others of equal antiquity and value. We have no traces of
our art which correspond to those grand mural paintings of Pompeii
now collected in the museum at Naples, which are supposed to date
from the first period of Roman painting. We have no parallel with
these to give evidence that our art was at all practiced in ancient
times.

The art of embalming was invented by the Egyptians for the pur-
opose of preserving dead bodies from decay by means of aromatics,
antiseptics or desiccation. It was an art created by the demands of
the religious superstition of the times, and was practiced by the ancients
from the earliest periods, but, unfortunately, was not calculated to
enlighten and elevate. In their sepulchres, tombs and pits are found
not only countless bodies of human beings, but also myriads of dogs,
apes, crocodiles, cats, ibises, sheep, oxen and other animals.

All this was associated with their religious belief, for they held that
the soul, after completing its cycle of separate existences extending
through several thousand years, again returned to the body, and if that
were found decayed or wasted, it transmigrated. It was not for the
love of having their specimens look natural and life-like, but for the
reason of their superstitious belief, that their spirits would, in course
of time, return to their bodies, and they would again live with their
cats and dogs as before the spirit left the body.

Embalming is simply a means of preservation, is a separate art,
and cannot, strictly speaking, come under the head of taxidermy, while
taxidermy proper attempts to reproduce the forms, attitudes and ex-
pressions of animals as they appear in life.

The skins of animals were used from the most remote periods for
clothing and various useful and ornamental articles, but respecting
those periods we have no knowledge of the skins being mounted to
represent life-like forms and attitudes. History records the fact that
the older Indian tribes decorated themselves on different occasions
with the heads of porcupines, foxes, raccoons, eagles, etc., stuffed so as
to look quite natural.

It is told that the first attempt to stuff birds was when the Hol-
landers in the early part of the sixteenth century began their commer-
cial intercourse with the East Indies.

A nobleman brought back to Amsterdam a large collection of live
tropical birds and placed them in an aviary, which was heated to the
proper temperature by a furnace. It happened that the attendant
one night before retiring carelessly left the door of the furnace open,
thereby allowing the smoke to escape, which suffocated the birds. The
nobleman beholding the destruction of his large collection, which was