Thomas Bewick and His Pupils

Dobson Austin
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TO

W. J. LINTON.

ENGRAVER AND POET.

THE STEADFAST APOSTLE OF BEWICK'S "WHITE LINE."

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.
PREFACE

Except to explain its appearance, there is little need of preface to the present volume. It is, for the most part, a reprint of two articles on Bewick and his pupils, prepared in 1881-82 for the New York "Century Magazine." That on Bewick, when illustrated, was found to be too long for publication in one number. An entire section devoted to John Bewick was consequently omitted, and other retrenchments were effected. In this reissue, the portions withdrawn are restored; and such corrections and additions as a writer usually makes in the case of a paper republished some time after it was written, have been inserted. The account of the Pupils, which, when first printed, was not abridged, has not now been materially altered. In both cases it would obviously have
been easy to further extend and amplify. But though something might have been gained in substance, more would have been lost in symmetry, while the general result would remain unchanged.

To have written too little on a subject, moreover, is scarcely a fault,—nay, in this particular instance it may almost be claimed as a merit. Few men have suffered as much as Thomas Bewick from that kind of admiration in which enthusiasm plays a far larger part than judgment. Over most of his earlier work, and over all his inferior work, Oblivion, without accusation of blindness, might advantageously "scatter her poppy;" and the plain-spoken philosopher of Gateshead, who had no desire "to feed the whimsies of the bibliomanists," would have heartily concurred in any such arrangement. What is most durable in Bewick, as it appears to those who prize him judiciously, is Bewick himself,—always provided that Bewick himself is attainable. Since he first restored it in England a hundred years ago, the art of wood-engraving has considerably progressed. As an Engraver pure and simple, many, including some of his pupils,
have rivalled him in mechanical dexterity of line and mere manipulative skill. But as an Artist and Naturalist, copying Nature with that loving awe which fears to do her wrong by the slightest deviation from the truth,—as a Humourist and Satirist, criticising life with the clear vision of independent common sense,—his gifts are distinctly "non-transferable." They are at their best in his best work; and it is on his best work that I have most willingly lingered in these pages, frankly neglecting his less individual efforts. In the words of Chaucer’s Man of Law—

"Me list not of the chaf no of the stre
Maken so long a tale, as of the corn."

It remains for me to put on record what obligations I have incurred in my task. To the Editors of the "Century Magazine," who, under great difficulties, spared no pains to illustrate my text effectively, my first and best thanks are due. To my friend Mr. J. W. Barnes of Durham, who has throughout aided and encouraged me in the kindest way, I cannot but feel especially indebted. To Messrs. E. and J. W. Ford
of Enfield, to Mr. T. W. U. Robinson of Houghton-le-Spring, to Mr. G. P. Boyce, to Mr. Frederick Locker, Mr. F. Hargrave Hamel, and Mr. J. Waddon Martyn I am grateful for valuable assistance: as also to Messrs. Harper of New York, Messrs. Cassell & Co., and Messrs. Griffith and Farran, by whose courtesy I have been able to increase the number of my illustrations. Lastly, to my English publisher, Mr. Andrew Chatto, who, though my investigations have taught me to differ in some trifling details from the too-little recognised labours of his father, nevertheless placed his father's notes at my disposal: and to Mr. Robert Robinson of Newcastle, who, having himself a long-desired book on Bewick in preparation, did not on that account regard me as a wolf in sheep's clothing, I hereby tender my sincere acknowledgments.

AUSTIN DOBSON.

Hatherley, Febru. Ealing, W.
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