



CROSSED PATHWAYS.

OH, grief, thou hast blessings, when sorest !
Oh, joy, thou hast dangers, when won !
Your pathways are crossed in the forest ;
But all may lead out to the sun.

Jeanie Peet.

SOME MODERN ETCHERS.

The ups and downs of etching as a popular branch of art—How a “lost art” was revived and developed by the modern French school of draftsmen of the needle.

A DOZEN, fifteen, twenty years ago, etching was one of the most important branches of art. Not only were the works of Whistler, Seymour Haden, and the modern French school eagerly snatched up as they came from the plates, but etchings by the earlier men went up to fabulous prices. It was understood that, next to painting itself, there was no art to which the artist lent so much of his individuality. He watched every process of his own work, and there was as much art in the “biting” and printing as in the drawing of the original lines.

There was an understanding, too, that a plate wore out after a little use, and that proof etchings were valuable. They still are, to collectors, but the taste of the general public swept on when manufacturers of etchings began using a process by which the plates could be hardened and made indestructible, and cheap prints were turned out by the thousand. Some etchers tried to stem the ebbing tide by printing only a limited number of proofs, and then cutting the plate into pieces, one of which they gave with each picture sold, as a guarantee that no more would be made; but bygone conditions could not be restored.

Nevertheless, to the worker himself there is no art more fascinating, and with artists etching still holds its old place. An exhibition of etchings by Whistler, given recently in this country, and the speedy sale of the best prints at large prices, proved that with real art lovers the etching is always in vogue.

There are many reasons for this. Of all the arts of pictorial reproduction, etching is the frankest and the most passionate. Even in an oil painting there are limitations made by the medium. In massing colors, intensity of form must sometimes be lost. Few men are able to paint an oil picture in one sitting, while

many etchers—notably Seymour Haden—finish a plate without rising from their work. The conception comes, and while the spirit is there the picture is made. The engraver has none of the dash and style of the etcher: his slow work with the burin embodies little of his own temperament in the lines. But an etcher, though he may be working “after” some one else, must put his own conception into his work.

About thirty five years ago, etching was regarded as almost a lost art. At first it was revived by a few artists here and there—men who despaired of interesting the public in their work. They reasoned that etching was too blunt, too little given to prettinesses, too frank. Meissonier, Delacroix, Daubigny, and Jacque all etched in their leisure hours; but it was not until Charles Méryon came that the art won general recognition. Méryon had not succeeded as a painter, but he became proficient with the needle point. Following him, Jules Jacquemart took up etching, interpreting still life with marvelous art. Publishers in France—all these pioneers in the renaissance were French—took up the revival and gathered about them all the men who had shown proficiency in handling the *eau forte*.

It was one of these publishers who persuaded Seymour Haden, the English surgeon amateur, who is usually called the best of the moderns, to devote himself to etching; so that the entire inspiration of the revival may be said to have come from France. There seems to be something in the art which appealed especially to the Gallic temperament.

The development of one branch—the interpretation of paintings—was mainly due to Léopold Flameng. At sixteen, Flameng had been clever enough to contribute engraved plates to a work upon