

**EXHIBITION OF
DRAWINGS BY THE
DUTCH MASTERS**

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Exhibition of Drawings by the Dutch Masters by Sir Frederick Wedmore

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SIR FREDERICK WEDMORE

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DUTCH MASTERS**

Burlington Fine Arts Club.

EXHIBITION OF DRAWINGS

BY THE

DUTCH MASTERS.

PRINTED FOR THE BURLINGTON FINE ARTS CLUB,

1878.

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A NOTE ON DUTCH DRAWINGS.

THE drawings, the studies, of the Italian Schools, and of all Schools besides, have these sources of interest, always admitted—they reveal to us, as studies must, the intimate thought of the master in his theme, and they may often be identified as preparations for some long recognised picture with whose history we are henceforth to be the better acquainted. But some among the drawings of the Dutch School, though coming late indeed in the procession of the world's best Art, are still the earliest to possess for us that different and self contained interest which belongs to work done for its proper sake, itself realising the intention with which it was begun, and so, in the first form in which it comes down to us, at once final and complete.

The School of Holland—that northern School to which at last, in the great Seventeenth Century, supremacy in Art had moved—was perhaps the first to adequately feel the value of those immediate impressions which the Italians and the early Flemish had recognised chiefly to control, to alter, to enlarge. And in the many methods of their Art, the masters of Holland sought to perpetuate for the beholders of their work the impressions which to themselves who recorded them had perhaps been as fleeting as vivid.

Sketches in oil, sketches in water colour, sketches in chalk, in bistre, and with the reed pen, and sketches with the etching needle—these all, in the hands of the great Dutchmen, were not merely studies for themselves but possessions for their public, just as expressive and interesting as work more prolonged and elaborate. Therefore the *amount* of finish which each of such finished sketches received was not the important matter: with the greatest artists the amount was often but small: they knew that the important matter was the *sufficiency* of finish—its capacity for conveying to one mind the impression received by another.

And it is characteristic of Dutch Art, and especially of Dutch Landscape Art, that it had no period of painful and tentative labour, like that during which the art of other schools had had to struggle slowly towards freedom of expression. Profiting no doubt by the experience of the Past, and the near Past especially of Bruges and of Leyden, it gained almost at once the power of finish always expressive, always economical, yet often very swift and summary. The work of its earliest Masters—Roghman say, and Van Goyen—has neither pettiness of manipulation when it is most delicate, nor uncertainty when it is most rapid. The signs of an art mature and masculine—economy of means, decision of hand—are promptly upon it. Roghman, it appears, made few pictures, but many drawings. There are five and twenty in the Museum of Rotterdam alone. His drawings, therefore, must have been acceptable to the public of his day, and they show that a public then existed capable of the intelligent interpretation of the work of an artist

who left much to be interpreted. Van Goyen, if he did not make many drawings, painted many pictures with at least as marked an economy of means as he has used in the few drawings we know, and of which the present Exhibition of this Club affords at least one admirable example. His science of large design and the expressive completeness of his gradations of tone enabled him—often in picture and drawing alike—to dispense with the easier attraction of various colour, so that even a modern master of colour, Théodore Rousseau, was wont to hold him up as a model to his own pupils.

Van Goyen travelled and Roghman travelled, but their art, like that of Rembrandt—their younger and greater contemporary, who remained at home—continued to be not an imported art, but an art of the soil; and it was only at a later period that the experience of travel, and the contact with an art very different from their own, was to bring to the Dutchmen a new method with a false ideal. There was first the true Dutch time, rich and fertile—a time in which Van Goyen painted, with a seeming monotony always delicately varied, the long river banks, the low-lying towns, and the great high skies of Holland; in which Cuyp fixed interest on the common aspects of the afternoon fields, steaming in moist sunshine; in which Adrian van Ostade passed from the vulgarities of the alehouse to the skilfully rendered charm of the cottage door and the bench in the sunlight; in which Jan Steen perfected himself in as keen and comprehensive a knowledge of the world of men as Art has ever displayed; and in which Rembrandt

contentedly imaged Dutch life and landscape, always with nearly equal vigour, nearly equal artistic precision, though at one time in a style that formed the style of Gerard Dow and at another in one that was inherited by Philippe de Koningh or by Nicholas Maas.

There were various local centres for these various workers and their works. Leyden itself was a centre—the birth-place of Rembrandt, the birth-place of Van Goyen. The Hague became a centre, and Van Goyen removed to it; Amsterdam a centre, and Rembrandt was a leader there. But Haarlem was the favourite, and probably because of the privileges that belonged to the Guild of St. Luke—St. Luke, the Painters' Patron Saint—which was established in that town. The Guild of St. Luke at Haarlem has left us valuable records—not indeed the riciest, but certainly among the most trustworthy, we can hope to have access to—upon Dutch Art, which has wanted always, and wants to-day, a trustworthy general historian. Laurens Van der Winne (as the Dutch writer, M. van der Willigen, tells us, in his *Artistes d'Harlem*), towards the end of the Seventeenth Century, made a list of 174 men who in his time were all reputed as good Painters, and whom he had personally known. His son, in 1702, after the father's death, noted that of these only sixteen were then living; and the grandson, possessing himself of manuscript books and account books of the period, was able to enlarge the list of early Members of the Guild, and to add to our knowledge of its laws. "No one without the pale of the Society could sell or introduce his pictures. Many Painters thus found themselves obliged to