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978-0-521-17258-5 - Woodcuts and Engravings by Albert Durer

T. D. Barlow

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Collected & Described

by

T. D. BARLOW

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## INTRODUCTION

ALBERT DÜRER was born at Nuremberg on May 21st, 1471, his father a goldsmith of Hungarian origin having settled there in 1455. He became a pupil of Michael Wolgemut, studied under him for three years and then travelled through Germany, visiting amongst other towns Colmar and Strassburg and in addition Basle, where he worked under George Schongauer. After a journey to Venice in 1494 he definitely settled in Nuremberg where he remained for the rest of his life with the exception of his second visit to Italy in 1505–1506, to Bamberg in 1517, Augsburg in 1518 and the Netherlands in 1520–1521. He died on April 6th, 1528.

Dürer's great industry and wide interests are attested not only by the large number of his drawings and engravings but by the books which he wrote and by his letters and journals. The universal tributes which were paid to him after his death bear witness to the fineness of his character and his personal charm. He had the good fortune to be born while the medieval tradition, though decadent, was still intact, to attain to the fullness of his powers while the new impulse of the Renaissance was most vigorous, and to die before it had degenerated into the sterility and formalism into which it so quickly fell, and before the political troubles which disturbed Germany for so long a period had disorganised her social life. The conflicting outlook of medievalism and of the Renaissance upon a mind so responsive to its surroundings is visibly impressed upon his work and produces a certain division of aim which has called forth criticism of its aesthetic quality. But in the circumstances this conflict was inevitable, and were the content of his work attenuated it may justly be claimed that the loss would greatly outweigh the gain. As a painter he is not of the highest rank but as a draughtsman and an engraver he must be reckoned amongst the great masters of all time.

This collection is nearly complete, apart from those woodcuts and engravings, which are known only by single impressions. A few rare woodcuts are also absent, but as I have endeavoured to describe not only my own collection but the whole of Dürer's engraved work I have utilised reproductions where I lack an original. A number of woodcuts cannot be included without some hesitation and the chronological order of the engravings and woodcuts which Dürer executed during the early years of his career is difficult exactly to determine. But our chief

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problem is the analysis and comprehension of the abstruse ideas to which he endeavoured to give expression. Such an analysis belongs to the domain of literature or general culture rather than to aesthetics. Nevertheless the interest aroused by Dürer's work cannot be satisfied without some attempt to explore its meaning. Though much has been elucidated of recent years much remains that is still obscure, and it is greatly to be desired that the Dürer manuscripts in the British Museum should be published. But the heavy expense that would thereby be involved renders so great an undertaking impossible at present. A number of woodcuts and engravings included by Bartsch can be summarily rejected, while a few which were unknown to him can be with equal assurance admitted. Of the engravings, the little S. Jerome, B. 62, and the Judgment of Paris, B. 65, may possibly reproduce designs by Dürer, but I have included neither these nor the Unfinished Crucifixion, P. 109, which was accepted by Passavant. Of the woodcuts, I have excluded those in the Gerson Nuremberg 1489 and the *Spiegel der Waren Rhetorik*, Freiburg 1493, which I do not believe to have any connection with Dürer, the S. Sebastian, D. 2, and the three woodcuts described by Dodgson in *Burlington Magazine*, 226, 1922, which seem to me to be imitations rather than to be based upon his actual designs. I have also excluded the portrait of the artist, B. 156, which was certainly executed after his death, and of Eobanus Hessus, which is a free copy of the silver-point drawing, L. 295. There are in addition a number of others catalogued by Dodgson under "Anonymous Woodcuts of the School of Nuremberg" which it is unnecessary to specify in detail. Most of these present no great difficulty, though the line of division between Dürer and Springinklee is in a few cases very finely drawn. It is indeed only reasonable to expect that the designs of some of Dürer's contemporaries should closely resemble his own, and whether a few woodcuts are to be included in a catalogue or its appendix is not a matter of very great importance. The chronological order of his early engravings, in so far as it is related to the evolution of his technique and style must always be a legitimate subject for speculation, but in the absence of definite information it is doubtful whether complete unison of opinion upon it will be secured. As regards watermarks, I have preferred, wherever possible, to use the general title Bull's Head, High Crown, etc., but where the form of a particular watermark is too elaborate for so brief a description I have given the reference to Briquet or Hausmann. Knowledge of watermarks is important for several reasons, and especially because they frequently enable us to assign an approximate date to a particular impression, but it is not necessary to analyse their forms with minute care. There are, e.g. many varieties of such a watermark as the Bull's Head but none of

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them is associated with a particular print or group of prints only, and the statement of the general title is all that is required. I have not thought it necessary to record such trivialities as the accidental scratches or marks which may be found upon a number of engravings. The vertical scratching which is found in several early engravings deserves mention as indicating earliness of impression, as does the absence of the heavy scratch below the bridge in the Great Fortune, B. 77. But it must be understood that such marks have no real significance and deliberate alteration of the plate or block is the only true basis for denoting difference of state.

With a few exceptions the impressions described in this catalogue are of fine quality. The great reputation which Dürer's engravings have always enjoyed has tended to preserve them from destruction and mediocre impressions are not uncommon. But fine impressions in fine condition printed from unworn plates and uninjured blocks never were common and are now difficult to secure. Had it not been for the disruption of certain famous collections during the last few years it is doubtful if this collection could have been made and I am in this respect greatly indebted to the knowledge and fine judgment of my friend Mr G. Mayer.

I print this catalogue with no illusions as to its inadequacy. It would be better if I were to defer its publication.

*But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingéd chariot hurrying near,*

and if I wait till I have corrected all its errors or until I have read all the valuable material that has been published in Germany during the last few years it never will be finished. Its obligations to Mr Campbell Dodgson it is superfluous to indicate and in dedicating it to him I desire most inadequately to record my thanks for his unfailing kindness on occasions too many to enumerate.

T. D. BARLOW