

Gems of Penmanship (1867)
By Williams & Packard

Preface

In preparing for publication a new work on Penmanship, the authors have been impelled by a desire to meet a demand hitherto unmet. And if any doubt had existed as to the activeness of this demand, it would have been many times removed by the gratifying interest which has been manifested by teachers and aspirants in all parts of the country since the public announcement of the "Gems."

In our earnest endeavor to meet the reasonable expectations thus excited, we have covered a wider field than has before been attempted within the measure of one volume; and if we have not treated each part of the subject with a fullness due to its individual importance, we honestly feel that nothing has been omitted necessary to a fair presentment of the best claims of the whole subject.

Writing, as an art, and more especially as a department of education, is rapidly attaining an important position in this country. The advantages possessed by those who write, we in securing good positions and rapid advancement are so palpable that very few of our young men undervalue this acquirement.

Much has been done by authors, and much more through the efforts of faithful teachers, to render this valuable accomplishment easy and sure of acquisition. Good and trite men have devoted themselves exclusively to the profession of teaching the art, and qualifying others to do so; and the appreciation of the public has been so prompt and remunerative that the profession has grown in extent and importance beyond all reasonable anticipation. One chief good which has grown out of the healthful competition thus engendered is the progress which has been made in the methods of instruction. The old system of teaching by submitting models for imitation has given place to scientific analyses of form, and the enforcement of the natural laws of movement, as the basis of execution, so that the student, though relying mainly for his proficiency on practice, is given ample employment for his mind in the mastery of the scientific principles which underlie his efforts.

The modern writing-master, if he is worthy of the rains, brings to his task a mind well stored, not out with the imagery of beautiful forms, but, with lessons of encouragement for the faltering, and incitements to renewed diligence for the ardent and hopeful. Standing before his blackboard with crayon in hand, with a few apt and well-timed remarks he fastens the attention of his class upon the subject specially under consideration, and with the rare facility which practice has given him, places before their eyes the graceful lines and curves of the copy. Each letter, as it seems to drop from his crayon, stands out upon the board a perfect embodiment of grace and beauty, awakening a sense of refined enjoyment and a spirit of emulation promotive of the, most satisfactory achievements. And then, with the shrewd forecast which experience has given him, he points out in advance the pitfalls of error which await the student, and the path by which they may be avoided, Thus, having suitable employment for mind and muscle, the student's writing hour passes rapidly away leaving the little seeds of knowledge to spring up day by day into the final harvest of successful endeavor.

During the past ten years the art of engraving has been constantly and increasingly in requisition to supply the growing demand for correct models and under the inspiration and suggestions of practical teachers, the graver has so faithfully followed in the wake of the pen that the former valid objections to engraved copies is daily losing its bold on popular prejudice. Formerly, to "write equal to copperplate" was deemed the very acme of human effort; now, to engrave equal to good writing is the laudable ambition of every engraver. Not that it is impossible or difficult to produce as fine, smooth, and graceful lines with the graver as with the pen, but that very few engravers are found who can reproduce the freedom and spirit characteristic of the rapidly-written line of a master penman

Hitherto the efforts of authors on this subject have been confined almost exclusively to primary and graded copies, to be used in the class exercises of public and private schools, leaving the higher application of the art to teachers and adepts. While this, as a preliminary step seems to be necessary, we believe that stopping at this point has been not only a mistake with authors but a great injustice to the art itself.

The special claim which authors have made to favorable, recognition has almost uniformly been the mathematical exactness of their copies, each letter having its positive space, slope, height, form, and shade; all being the result of established rules. While these regulations are admirable and essential in primary copies, and while it is, in a certain sense, true that writing after exact models secures system and regularity of style. the fact, will not be lost sight of that written copies are, almost universally preferred to engraved, because they are not exact, and for that reason possess more freedom and come more readily within the scope of the learner's ability to emulate. In the practical portion of file work we have kept these facts in view. The first seventy-two lines, comprising nine pages, and devoted to the brief unfolding of a system of practical penmanship, partake of this character of exactness in slope, spacing, form, etc. In the pages which immediately follow, containing business forms, the application of these principles is made with all the latitude admissible in rapid lien execution. The engraver has produced a facsimile copy of the writing as it came from the pen without the. accustomed "patching" and "tinkering" to which copy lines are, subject before going into the engraver's hand. We believe that what is lost in geometrical exactness is more than recovered in the greater freedom and business characteristics of the writing. In the two pages containing Face of Ledger, Letter Superscriptions, etc., and Invoice of Dry Goods, Account Current, etc., we have presented Business Writing in its every-day garb, and just as it appears upon the, merchant's books, and in his bills and documents. Neither the capitals nor the extended and contracted small letters have been measured, and they would probably not conform to any "scale of proportions." The downward strokes have not been guided by parallel lines, running at an exact angle from the base, and may vary from any established rule in this regard. The limited space admits of no labored flourishing, or "grace-lines;" and yet, with all its drawbacks, the majority of People will pronounce it "good writing," and its general appearance of Smoothness, uniformity, and legibility will save it from severe criticism, even from professors of the art. In fact, these two pages are submitted at the suggestion of quite a respectable number of "live teachers," who have ventured to suggest that, in preparing a work for use, at least so much space should be given to the purely practical.

In addition to the regular graded copies and practical forms a very large and useful variety of "movement exercises" is given on the margins of these pages, affording sufficient practice in whole-arm, muscular, and finger, movements to secure all the attainable results in this direction. The use of the metronome in connection with these exercises will be found of incalculable benefit and especially in large classes, where perfect uniformity of movement can be secured.

In short, although we are aware that the peculiar charm of the book will center in the more finished artistic portions, embracing Off-hand Flourishing, Lettering, and Pen Drawing, we have no thought nor desire to use these attractive pages as a blind to any short-comings in this the most useful part of the work. Our aim has been to make each department complete within itself, and we prefer to place our labor thus upon its merits.

In the department of Off-hand Flourishing we shall be, liable to less severe criticism than elsewhere, owing to the fact that there is before the public no other work of this character. And, whatever may be said, or dreamt, in reference to other portions of the book, the marked peculiarities of these intertwining and harmonious curves, cropping out in the form of birds, beasts, and plants, will at once establish their authorship. This portion of the book is full and exhaustive, and enables the author to put the seal of paternity on a number of little devices that,, for a few years past, have been floating upon the wave of popular appreciation, without an acknowledged haven. We would not have it inferred, however, that, because we have furnished this beautiful cage for our birds and beasts, they are not as free to fly and roam as before. We only desire by this public acknowledgement to remove all doubts as to the authenticity and respectability of their lineage.

In the department of Lettering and Pen-Drawing we feel that we have answered all reasonable expectations. Although in this direction the paths are not so new and Harrod, we do not hesitate to present our claims to honorable recognition.

If there is any published treatise on lettering that can be used with so much advantage by penmen, engravers, sign painters, and whoever desires to excel in this branch of art, we have not seen it. The plan of

presenting the subject is original with us, as are many of the most attractive and useful features; and we do not fear that a careful examination of this portion of the book will work our condemnation.

In the department, of Pen-Drawing proper, we have submitted but two models prepared expressly as such, viz., the "Bird's Nest," and the "Hand and Pen." But the student will find some of the most elaborate and satisfactory work of this kind in the filling-up and ornamentation of nearly all the fancy letters. Let him, for instance, reproduce the fine effects of the "Ribbon Alphabet," or the "Rustic." Had these letters been prepared expressly as studies in pen-drawing and fine Shading, they could not more fully have answered the requirements.

But with all this confidence, so frankly expressed in a kindly reception by our friends and the public, we enter on our "trial trip" with many misgivings. Although we have earnestly striven toward perfection, we have not hoped to reach it. And we look for no brighter reward than the acceptance of our labor as a faithful and conscientious effort to raise the, standard of the noble art we have espoused, and to advance the prosperity and happiness of all earnest workers in its ranks.

The Authors
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