

## CHAPTER VII.

*Holbein's Bible cuts.—Examination of the claim of Hans Lutzenberger as to the design or execution of the Lyons engravings of the Dance of Death.—Other works by him.*



AT this time the celebrated designs for the illustration of the Old Testament, usually denominated Holbein's Bible, made their appearance, with the following title, "Historiarum veteris instrumenti icones ad vivum expressæ. Una cum brevi, sed quoad fieri potuit, dilucida earundem expositione. Lugduni, sub scuto Coloniensi MDCXXXVIII." 4to. They were several times republished with varied titles, and two additional cuts. Prefixed are some highly complimentary Latin verses by Holbein's friend Nicholas Bourbon, better known by his Latinized name of Borbonius, who again introduces Parrhasius and Zeuxis in Elysium, and in conversation with Apelles, who laments that they had all been excelled by Holbein.

These lines by Borbonius do not appear, among others addressed by him to Holbein, in the first edition of his "Nugæ" in 1533, or indeed in any of the subsequent editions; but it is certain that Borbonius was at Lyons in 1538, and might then have been called on by the publishers of the designs, with whom he was intimately connected, for the commendatory verses.

The booksellers Frelon of Lyons, by some means with which we are not now acquainted, or indeed ever likely to be, became possessed of the copyright to these de-

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signs for the Old Testament. It is very clear that they had previously been in possession of those for the Dance of Death, and, finding the first four of them equally adapted to a Bible, they accordingly, and for the purpose of saving expense, made use of them in this Bible, though with different descriptions, having, in all probability, employed the same engraver on wood as in the Dance of Death, a task to which he had already demonstrated himself to be fully competent. Now, if the Frellons had regarded Holbein as the designer of the "Simulachres et historiees faces de la Mort," would they not rather have introduced into that work the complimentary lines of Borbonius on *some* painting by Holbein of a Dance of Death, and which will be hereafter more particularly adverted to, instead of inserting the very interesting and decisive dedication that has so emphatically referred to the then deceased painter of the above admirable composition?

Nor is it by any means a matter of certainty that Holbein was the designer of *all* the wood engravings belonging to the Bible in question. Whoever may take the pains to examine these biblical subjects with a strict and critical eye, will not only discover a very great difference in the style and drawing of them, but likewise a striking resemblance, in that respect, of several of them to those in the Dance of Death, as well as in the manner of engraving. The rest are in a bolder and broader style, in a careless but effective manner, corresponding altogether with such designs as are well ascertained to be Holbein's, and of which it would be impossible to produce a single one, that in point of delicacy of outline, or composition, accords with those in the Dance;<sup>5</sup> and the judgment of those

<sup>5</sup> The few engravings by or after Holbein that have his name or its initials are to be found in his early frontispieces or vignettes to books printed at Basle. In 1548, two delicate wood-cuts, with his name,

who are best acquainted with the works of Holbein is appealed to on this occasion. It is, besides, extremely probable that the anonymous painter or designer of the Dance might have been employed also by the Frellons to execute a set of subjects for the Bible previously to his Death, and that Holbein was afterwards engaged to complete the work.

A comparison of the 8th subject in the "Simulachres, &c." with that in the Bible for Esther I. II. where the canopy ornamented with fleurs-de-lis is the same in both, will contribute to strengthen the above conjecture, as will both the cuts to demonstrate their Gallic origin. It is most certain that the king sitting at table in the Simulachres is intended for Francis I. which, if any one should doubt, let him look upon the miniature of that king, copied at p. 214 in Clarke's "Repertorium bibliographicum," from a drawing in a French MS. belonging to M. Beckford, or at a wood-cut in fo. xcix b. of "L'histoire de Primaleon de Grece." Paris, 1550, folio, where the art in the latter will be found to resemble very much that in the "Simulachres." The portraits also of Francis by Thomas De Leu, Boissevin, and particularly that in the portraits of illustrious men edited

occur in Cranmer's Catechism. In the title-page to "a lytle treatise after the maner of an Epystle wryten by the famous clerk, Doctor Urbanus Regius, &c." Printed by Gwalter Lynne, 1548, 24mo, there is a cut in the same style of art of Christ attended by his disciples, and pointing to a fugitive monk, whose sheep are scattered, and some devoured by a wolf. Above and below are the words "John x. Ezech. xxxiii. Mich. v. I am the good shepehearde. A good shepehearde geveth his lyfe for the shype. The hyred servaunt flyeth, because he is an hered servaunt, and careth not for the shepe." On the cut at bottom HANS HOLBEIN. There is a fourth cut of this kind in the British Museum collection with Christ brought before Pilate; and perhaps Holbein might have intended a series of small engravings for the New Testament; but all these are in a simple outline and very different from the cuts in the Dance of Death, or Lyons Bible. It might be difficult to refer to any other engravings belonging to Holbein after the above year.

by Beza at Geneva, may be mentioned for the like purpose.

The admission in the course of the preceding remarks that Holbein might have been employed in some of the additional cuts that appeared in the editions of the Lyons Dance of Death which followed that of 1538, may seem at variance with what has been advanced with respect to the Bible cuts ascribed to him. It is, however, by no means a matter of necessity that an artist with Holbein's talents should have been resorted to for the purpose of designing the additional cuts to the Lyons work. There were, during the middle of the 16th century, several artists equally competent to the undertaking, both as to invention and execution, as is demonstrable, among numerous other instances, from the spurious, but beautiful, Italian copy of the original cuts; from the scarcely distinguishable copies of the Lyons Bible cuts in an edition put forth by John Stelsius at Antwerp, 1561, and from the works of several artists, both designers and wood-engravers, in the books published by the French, Flemish, and Italian booksellers at that period. An interesting catalogue raisonnè might be constructed, though with some difficulty, of such articles as were decorated with most exquisite and interesting embellishments. The above century was much richer in this respect than any one that succeeded it, displaying specimens of art that have only been rivalled, perhaps never outdone, by the very skilful engravers on wood of modern times.

Our attention will, in the next place, be required to the excellent *engraver* of the Dance of Death, the thirty-sixth cut of which represents the Duchess sitting up in bed, and accompanied with two figures of Death, one of which plays on a violin, whilst the other drags away the bed-clothes. On the base of one of the bed-posts is the mark or monogram **H**, which has, among other artists, been inconsiderately ascribed to Holbein.

That it was intended to express the name of the designer cannot be supported by evidence of any kind. We must then seek for its meaning as belonging to the engraver, and whose name was, in all probability, Hans Leuczellberger or Lutzenberger, sometimes called Franck. M. de Mechel, the celebrated printseller and engraver at Basle, addressed a letter to M. de Murr, in which he states that on a proof sheet of an alphabet in the library in that city, containing several small figures of a Dance of Death, he had found the above name. M. Brulliot remarks that he had seen some of the letters of this alphabet, but had not perceived on them either the name of Lutzenberger, or the mark **HL**;<sup>6</sup> but M. de Mechel has not said that the *mark* was on the proof sheet, or on the letters themselves, but only the name of Lutzenberger, adding that the **HL** on the cut of the Duchess will throw some light on the matter, and that Holbein, although this monogram has been usually ascribed to him, never expressed his name by it, but used for that purpose an **H** joined to a **B**; in which latter assertion M. de Mechel was by no means correct.

On another alphabet of a Dance of Peasants, in the possession of the writer of these pages, and undoubtedly by the same artists, M. de Mechel, to whom it was shown when in England, has written in pencil, the following memorandum: "**HL** gravè par Hans (John) Lutzenberger, graveur en patrons à Basle, vivant là au commencement du 16me siecle;" but he has inadvertently transferred the remark to the wrong alphabet, though both were undoubtedly the work of the same artist, as well as a third alphabet, equally beautiful, of groups of children.

The late Pietro Zani, whose intimate experience in

<sup>6</sup> Brulliot dict. de monogrammes, &c. Munich, 1817, 4to. p. 418, where the letter from De Mechel is given.

whatever relates to the art of engraving, together with the vast number of prints that had passed under his observation, must entitle his opinions to the highest consideration, has stated, in more places than one in his "Enciclopedia Metodica," that Holbein had no concern with the cuts of the Lyons Dance of Death, the engraving of which he decidedly ascribes to Hans Lutzenberger; and, without any reference to the inscription on the proof of one of the alphabets in the library at Basle before-mentioned, which he had probably neither seen nor heard of, mentions the copy of one of the alphabets which he had seen at Dresden, and at once consigns it to Lutzenberger. He promises to resume the subject at large in some future part of his immense work, which, if existing, has not yet made its appearance.

As the prints by this fine engraver are very few in number, and extremely rare, the following list of them may not be unacceptable.

1. An oblong wood engraving, in length 11 inches by  $3\frac{1}{2}$ . It represents, on one side, Christ requiring the attention of a group of eight persons, consisting of a monk, a peasant with a flail, a female, &c. to a lighted taper on a candelabrum placed in the middle of the print; on the other side, a group of thirteen or fourteen persons, preceded by one who is looking into a pit in which is the word PLATO. Over his head is inscribed ARISTOTELES; he is followed by a pope, a bishop, monks, &c. &c.

2. Another oblong wood engraving,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $2\frac{1}{2}$ , in two compartments, divided by a pillar. In one, the Judgment of Solomon; in the other, Christ and the woman taken in adultery; he writes something on the ground with his finger. It has the date 1539.

3. Another, size as No. 2. An emperor is sitting in a court of justice with several spectators attending some trial. This is doubtful.

4. Another oblong print,  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 3, and in two compartments. 1. David prostrate before the Deity in the clouds, accompanied by Manasses and a youth, over whom is inscribed *OFFEN SVNDER*. 2. A pope on a throne delivering some book, perhaps letters of indulgence, to a kneeling monk. This very beautiful print has been called "The Traffic of Indulgences," and is minutely and correctly described by Jansen.<sup>7</sup>

5. A print, 12 inches by 6, representing a combat in a wood between several naked persons and a troop of peasants armed with instruments of husbandry. Below on the left, the letters *H V*. Annexed are two tablets, one of which is inscribed *HANS LEVCZELBVRGER FVRMSCHNIDER*; on the other is an alphabet. Jansen has also mentioned this print.<sup>8</sup> Brulliot describes a copy of it in the cabinet of prints belonging to the King of Bavaria, in which, besides the name, is the date *MDXXII*.<sup>9</sup>

6. A print of a dagger or knife case, in length 9 inches. At top, a figure inscribed *VENVS* has a lighted torch in one hand and a horn in the other; she is accompanied by Cupid. In the middle two boys are playing, and at bottom three others standing, one with a helmet.

7. A copy of Albert Durer's decollation of John the Baptist, with the mark *H L* reversed, is mentioned by Zani as certainly belonging to this artist.<sup>10</sup> In the index of names, he says, he finds his name thus written *HANNS LVTZELBVRGER FORMSCHNIDER GENANT* (chiamato) *FRANCK*, and calls him the true prince of engravers on wood.

8. An alphabet with a Dance of Death, the subjects

<sup>7</sup> *Essai sur l'origine de la gravure, &c.* tom. i. p. 260.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* p. 261.

<sup>9</sup> *Dict. de monogrammes, &c.* tom. i. pp. 418, 499.

<sup>10</sup> *Enciclop. metod.* par ii. vol. vii. p. 16.

of which, with a few exceptions, are the same as those in the other Dance; the designs, however, occasionally vary. In delicacy of drawing, in strength of character and in skill as to engraving they may be justly pronounced superior to every thing of the kind, and their excellence will probably remain a long time unrivalled. The figures are so small as almost to require the aid of lenses, the size of each letter being only an inch square. Zani had seen and admired this alphabet at Dresden.<sup>11</sup>

9. Another alphabet by the same artists. It is a Dance of Peasants, intermixed with other subjects, some of which are not of the most delicate nature. They are smaller than the letters in the preceding article, and are probably connected in point of design with the Dance of Peasants that Holbein is said to have painted at Basle.

10. Another alphabet, also by the same artists. This is in all respects equal in beauty and merit to the others, and exhibits groups of boys in the most amusing and playful attitudes and employments. The size of the letters is little more than half an inch square. These children much resemble those which Holbein probably added to the later editions of the Lyons engravings.<sup>12</sup>

The proofs of the above alphabets, may have been deposited by Lutzenberger in the public library of his native city. Whether they were cut on wood or on metal may admit of a doubt; but there is reason to believe that the old printers and type-cutters occasionally used blocks of metal instead of wood for their figured initial letters, and the term *formschneider* equally applies to those who engraved in relief on either of those

<sup>11</sup> Enciclop. metod. par. i. vol. x. p. 467.

<sup>12</sup> All the above prints are in the author's possession, except No. 7, and his copy of No. 5 has not the tablets with the name, &c.



materials. Nothing can exceed the beauty and spirit of the design in these alphabets, nor the extreme delicacy and accurate minuteness of the engraving.

The letters in these respective alphabets were intended for the use of printers, and especially those of Basle, as Cratander, Bebelius, and Isingrin. Copies and imitations of them are to be found in many books printed at Zurich, Strasburg, Vienna, Augsburg, Frankfort, &c. and a few even in books printed at London by Waley, Purslowe, Marsh, and Nicholson, particularly in a quarto edition of Coverdale's Bible, if printed in the latter city; and one of them, a capital A, is in an edition of Stowe's Survey of London, 1618, 4to.

There is an unfortunate ambiguity connected with the marks that are found on ancient engravings in wood, and it has been a very great error on the part of all the writers who treat on such engravings, in referring the marks that accompany them to the block-cutters, or as the Germans properly denominate them the *formschneiders*, whilst, perhaps, the greatest part of them really belong to the designers, as is undoubtedly the case with respect to Albert Durer, Hans Schaufelin, Jost Amman, Tobias Stimmer, &c. It may be laid down as a rule that there is no certainty as to the marks of engravers, except where they are accompanied with some implement of their art, especially a graving tool. Where the designer of the subject put his mark on the drawing which he made on, or for, the block, the engraver would, of course, copy it. Sometimes the marks of both designer and engraver are found on prints, and in these cases the ambiguity is consequently removed.