

A GREAT GERMAN ARTIST—ADOLF MENZEL.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS OF HIS WORK.



AT THE SPINET.



MENZEL is a little giant,—if I am not mistaken, about one and a half or two inches smaller than Meissonier,—and, with his seventy-six years, as young as most of the young artists of the present generation.

For a long time Menzel's work was understood and appreciated only by the very few, and even now little of it reaches the hands of art-dealers. Neither is his work in itself of the popular kind. In the great mass of his productions there is to be found every artistic element, every note in the music of form and color. His pictures range from the quietly sentimental to the sublime and the dramatic.

How Menzel could master so vast a field seems almost incomprehensible. One is reminded of the strength, many-sidedness, and multiplicate ability of some of the old masters.

If there is one direction where Menzel might seem comparatively weak, it is only in a certain lyric quality, with which indeed he has never exactly been in sympathy from the very beginning of his career. Menzel's art is always more manly than lovely; and yet in contradiction to this apparent exception he has shown many an interesting and fascinating example, as, for instance, in "Illustrations to the Works of Frederick the Great." A small sketch giving the portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour is a charming example of graceful and lovely arrangement; and again the frame about this picture, being of his own invention, illustrates in allegoric ornamentation the story of this woman as well as the character of the life at the French court in her day.

"Saying a great deal" with the most refined and modest artistic means is one of the chief characteristics of Menzel. The book just mentioned contains about two hundred drawings



AT KISSINGEN.



QUICK SKETCH OF RICHARD WAGNER AT A BAIREUTH REHEARSAL.

on various subjects. It was an order by King Frederick William IV. in 1843, and was completed in about six years. It was at first issued in an edition of only three hundred copies, which were not destined for the market, being presented by the king to libraries, public institutions, and to men of note and merit whom he wished to distinguish by the gift. In 1882, however, a popular edition was printed. In such works as this Menzel is never a slave to the word, and both text and illustration remain independent in spite of their coherence. It is surprising to see how successfully this artist recreates, as it were, in his own art and in his own material the written motive.

The inclination to allegorize and explain by symbol, to philosophize with the pencil, can be traced back to a very early date in the artist's career. Even in his appearance before the public with a series of drawings, "Artist World Wanderings," which he completed while still a boy of seventeen, he explains the composition

with a small allegory at the foot of each print. A striking example of his peculiar way of transcribing and explaining by picture a philosophical thought is a small vignette belonging to the volume of the "Works of Frederick the Great." In an "Epistle to my brother Ferdinand" Frederick contemplates the different varieties, the nature and vanity, of human wishes: "What we have we neglect and never appreciate sufficiently, while we strive in vain to possess what we cannot achieve." Menzel shows a bird-cage through which is laid a twig from a cherry tree rich with ripe fruit. The little prisoner within pays no attention to the delicious offering, and is painfully engaged in trying to escape from the cage; while another bird outside, in total disregard of his liberty, eagerly tries to push through the wires of the cage in order to reach the cherries.

Unless these story-telling, philosophical illustrations were artistic equally in conception and execution, so that in a certain sense one could easily sacrifice the thought for the picture, Menzel would be guilty of the mistake formerly often made and still sometimes made by German artists, who seemed to forget that color and form were their material, and that the most beautiful thought and motive amount to nothing if not beautifully expressed. Menzel has rediscovered for himself this lost principle long before his contemporaries.

It is a fact, also, that he understood over forty years ago what is now called the "modern" in art—*plein air*, truth, naïveté, simplicity, and the impression of the moment; and in historical painting that the soul of the picture is the event, and that the various hats, buttons, bows, spurs, and straps of the costume are not the most important elements. He recognized the value of the true inner relation of one figure to another, subordinate to which should be absolute historical truth and scientific correctness of all accessories, not forgetting always *the picture*.

Menzel well justifies these principles in another work, "Frederick and his Paladins." We absolutely believe in each of the figures, and while enjoying the wonderfully characteristic appearance of these soldiers are not at all distracted by details of garment and uniforms. It is only by closer examination that one may recognize the immense study, the tremendous labor, the conscience and zeal with which the artist followed up all the sources pertaining to



A SERMON IN THE OPEN AIR.

his subjects. And it is interesting to see by his sketch-books how faithfully and thoroughly he went to work. It was not sufficient for him to sketch an object in the view he wished to give of it, but he must draw a gun, a sword, a *porte-épée*, a saddle, from two, three, four, and even five different points of view, making himself so accurately acquainted with the object that in his mind he seemed to have it before him in plastic form. Even with portraits we find him following the same principle, as, for instance, in a historic picture, "The Crowning of King William I. at

Königsberg." His sketches and studies for this show numerous heads of illustrious persons from all sides, and so thoroughly characteristic are these that one is left in no doubt about the likeness whatever. This picture, in its beautiful, mellow golden tone, has often been criticized very severely and unjustly, for it is only the subject itself that is unsympathetic. It was an order from the court in Berlin, who wished the event portrayed absolutely as it happened, and allowed not a single artistic liberty. The portraits are innumerable. The interior of the



SHARPENING TOOLS IN A VILLAGE SMITHY, NEAR GASTEIN.

Protestant church is unpicturesque, and the whole subject is not of the kind that would have inspired an artist like Menzel; nevertheless he solved the enormous difficulties in a marvellous manner. Unluckily this picture, like a great many others, is not easily accessible to the public, being placed in the palace at Berlin. Among a large number of smaller ones in the palace there is also a huge canvas representing "The Night at Hochkirch," the foreground figures of which are over life-size. It is the battle of Hochkirch, on the night of the 14th and 15th of October, 1758, when the fate of the Prussians seemed hopeless, the lines of the Austrians closing in upon them from all sides. Frederick, with his aide-de-camp, suddenly appears and takes command, and with one last effort the grenadiers hasten to the front.

On the occasion of the celebration of Menzel's seventieth birthday, in 1885, the Academy in Berlin arranged an exhibition with as many of his works as could be obtained. There were several hundred pictures and studies to be seen, and this picture was among them. It is not presumptuous to declare this battle-scene to be probably the best of its kind, without a single exception, new or old. The vigor and life of the dramatic scene, the wonderful effect of light coming only from a burning village, the

breadth and boldness with which the subject is treated, have never been surpassed, and justly may this picture be considered the finest example extant of "war-painting." It rouses and astonishes one as does the "Night-watch" by Rembrandt in Amsterdam, and, once seen, it never can leave the memory. Had Menzel painted only this one picture, he would rank among the best artists of all nations and of all times.

The person of Frederick the Great seems to have made a deep impression upon Menzel at a very early date, and at a time when Frederick was not so much thought of as now. Menzel took a great fancy to the figure of Frederick, and has now in fact created and fixed the picture of this monarch for all coming ages. His works on the subject are very numerous, and are probably the most reliable source for the knowledge of this royal personage.

Frederick's army was a motive of equal interest to him. He treated it in three vast volumes, containing a minute description and explanation, by means of highly artistic illustrations, of the uniforms, customs, and character of all the regiments and classes of soldiers. Not only is the appearance of each soldier in the different uniforms given, but also each habit and custom, as well as the manner of carrying and using the weapon, of wearing

the garment, and the fashion of the hair, mustaches, and wig.

"Frederick's Time" is the title of a book containing the portraits of Frederick's generals, and "Illustrations to the Works of Frederick the Great" make two large volumes of drawings. "The Life of Frederick the Great by Kugler" contains some four hundred engravings, which book, I believe, is one of the artist's first more elaborate attempts. Then follow "Events in Brandenburg History," and, later, his most wonderful "Broken Jug," a comedy by Kleist. Indeed, Menzel's illustrations alone would be enough to fill an ordinary lifetime, and yet they are only a relatively small fraction of what he has produced in all the fields of art, and with every material known.

Menzel in his childhood was a "wonder," but luckily he was not ruined and misled by early worship and exaggerated praise. He was forced to rely largely upon himself. His

an artist instead of a "student." Soon after the school days father and son were deeply engaged in the little lithographic establishment, and often did they sit together working at one table, but not always in perfect agreement with each other. The son was more interested in the artistic elaboration of a subject, while the old gentleman's inclination was to make lithography a lucrative undertaking. Still he had the proper interest in his son's future, and for his sake removed to Berlin in order to send young Menzel to the academy. The boy had no sympathy with academic training, and when he entered the class to study from the cast he at once felt how little this manner of education was suited to him. The result was that he soon left the institution.

Instead of submitting to academic training he chose to wander about the city from one art-dealer's window to another. The old copperplate engravings on exhibition there seemed

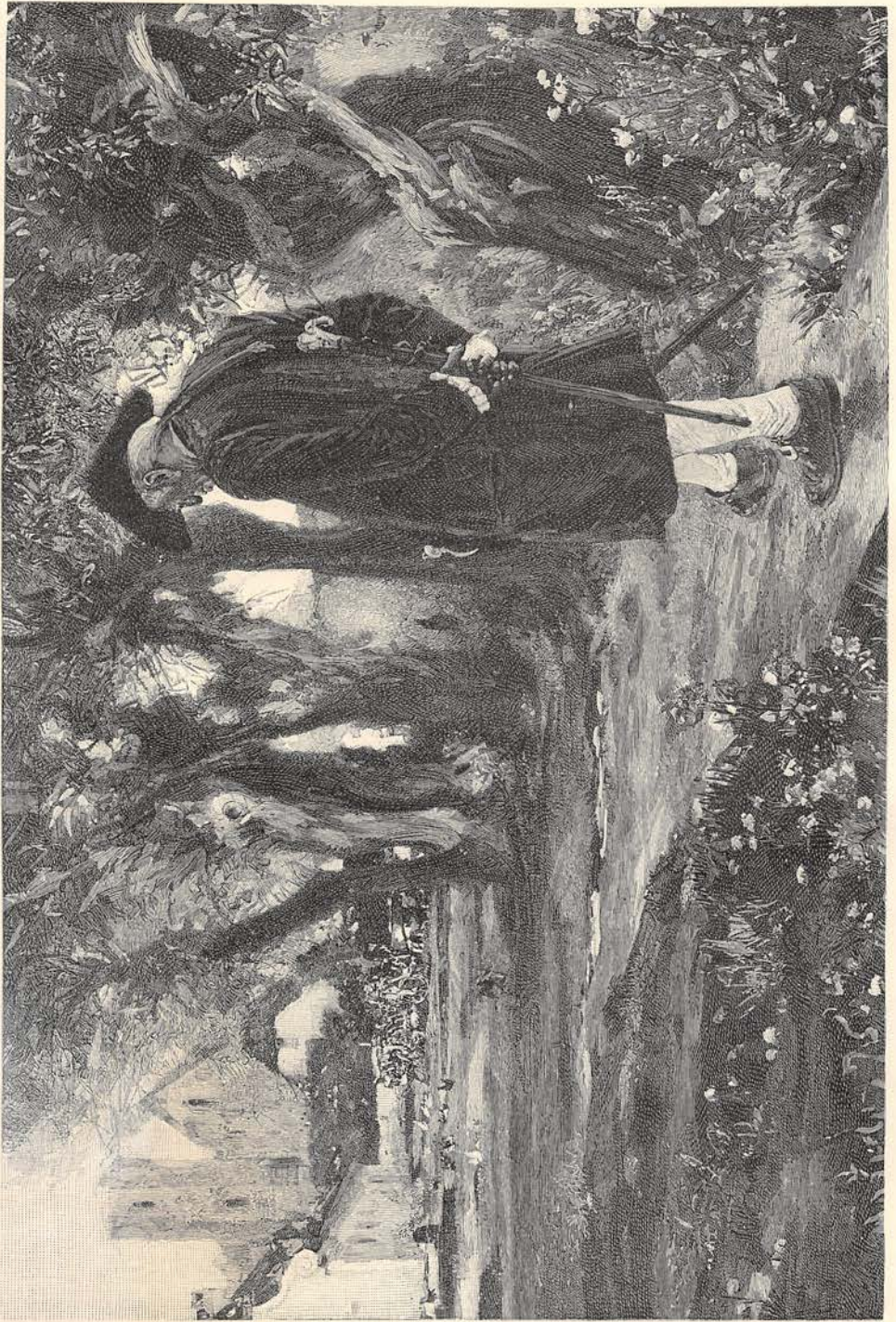


FREDERICK AND HIS MEN AT HOCHKIRCH.

father, however, was a clever man, who, having conducted a young girls' school, ceased teaching in order to exercise the new art of Senefelder's lithography. He detected the child's genius very early, and paid careful attention to the boy's education. Young Menzel was at first expected to enter on a scientific career — until finally the father allowed his boy to become

to interest him more than anything else. For hours he was to be found at these places, as often before in his native city of Breslau.

Aside from his interest in engravings he had a sensitive eye and an open mind for the architecture and mural paintings in the various churches by the numerous Italian masters of the eighteenth century. It was Menzel who



THE FROMENADER.



THE RETURN OF THE HUSSAR PATROL.

later on taught his people the beauty and refinement, grace and elegance, of the rococo, and convinced them that the art and style of this period were not to be neglected and despised, as was frequently the case in the beginning of our century and long after.

To what degree young Menzel had cultivated technic even at the age of thirteen may be seen in a composition, "Publius Cornelius Scipio and Lucius Metellus in the Roman Senate," executed in pencil in the manner of a steel-engraving. That this was the attempt of such a youth no one would believe, and the picture is still more surprising as an evidence of early cultivation.

About the time that he entered the academy his father died, leaving to his son all the responsibility for the family. He cheerfully took his father's place in business, and willingly fulfilled all orders, which often were far from being of an artistic nature. But wherever he found the least possibility he tried to apply the principles of his art, thus cultivating and developing his inventive power. He was asked to make everything—labels, show-cards, letterheads, cards, vignettes, diplomas, etc. A peculiar manner of adapting the ornament and improving the arabesque are his invention, of which we have most striking examples in the various diplomas designed by him. One of the finest designs in this direction is "The Lord's Prayer," made in 1837,

when Menzel was only twenty-two years of age. The pencil and the needle on stone were his favorites until he was twenty, when he first tried paint, dropping this material very soon, however, in disgust and disappointment. The point seemed more natural to him. By and by, owing to a great extent to the persuasion of his friends, he again took up color, and at once seems to have found his way into the secrets of his new material. "At the Lawyer's" was his first exhibit, which, being disposed of very soon, gave him encouragement in a field which he has since cultivated with great success.

In independence, originality, and power of invention Menzel is unsurpassed. No material, no style, no genre, has remained unknown to him, and in each has he produced most excellent examples. His love for nature and truth in his studies are unbounded, and the ardor and alacrity with which he began as a young man have not left him to this day. He works incessantly, and finds that everything is worth studying, that everything is of interest to him, and whatever he does bears the signature of art.

It is said that the number of his portfolios with studies and sketch-books is so vast as to appear like a library. When a young student once came to him inquiring about designs, patterns, and motives in wrought-iron, Menzel brought forth his studies in such numbers that

it appeared to the young man as if the master could have done nothing else in his life, so abundant were his studies in this one subject.

Sometimes it has been said that this greatest of German artists produces more with his brain than with his heart and his soul. If this is true, how wonderfully must this brain be constructed to bring forth such marvels!

Standing at the front with the greatest and best of his time, with an immortal name, an artist whose work will be an example as long

once asked why he would not explore other countries, he exclaimed that there was so much to study about him that never in a lifetime could he conquer more than a small fraction of it. To Paris and Brussels he has gone now and then to inspect exhibitions. In Meissonier he found an enthusiastic admirer and friend, and there is an anecdote concerning the intercourse between the two which, if not true, is at least well invented and most characteristic. Meissonier could not speak German, and it was



CONTRIBUTION.

as there is love for art and the beautiful in this world, Menzel is most modest in character. When asked for an opinion, he is candid and true, possibly severe, but never without kind consideration. When he visits exhibitions he examines every picture, and seems to find something, be it ever so little, to admire in each.

It seems singular that he has never made a study-trip in the sense in which they are undertaken by students of art. He has never seen Italy save the city of Verona, and when

difficult for Menzel to make himself understood in French; nevertheless they walked about together, and contented themselves in now and again grasping and pressing each other's hands in reciprocal appreciation.

Menzel's "Modern Cyclops" and his "Ball Supper" are pictures ranking among his best, and although he is an old man to-day, we may expect many more pictures from this great artist, whose device has ever been: *Nulla dies sine linea*.

Carl Marr.

NOTES BY OTHER AMERICAN ARTISTS.

LIKE other men of rare make-up, Menzel dared to stem the flow of traditional thought and prejudice, and in return suffered much from ridicule. The distinguishing merits of his art are many. He is spontaneous, frank and direct, brilliant and vigorous, and often audacious and unrelenting in

his truthfulness. While his canvases are absolutely based on actual observation, they never tire us with commonplace facts; these he makes subservient to his greater truths, while their reality suffers but little thereby. Some men draw with their fingers, some add the force of their hand, fewer

successfully bring their arms into play without injuring the delicate touch that their fingers may have given their work. Menzel stands with Meissonier and Barye among the few who bring fingers, hands, arms, body, and every available muscle and sensitive tissue to bear on the result; and this with such a brilliancy and conviction of being in the right that the contemplation of his work must bring a flush of fire to the heads of all sensitive fellow craftsmen. It is a veritable privilege to live in his time and, too, to see the work of those he has influenced—like our own Abbey. The *spirit* that lives in Menzel appeals to all, no matter what our individual ideas may have led us to prefer. This inner fire it was that made Menzel and upholds him in old age. The “prophet of the ugly,” as they called Menzel in 1835, or thereabouts, was first appreciated thoroughly by Fortuny, says Friedrich Pecht. “He imitated the sparkling brilliancy of his touch and color, and developed it with amazing success; in the conception of mankind and times, however, he could not approach Menzel’s art.” Herr Pecht is also authority for the statement that Menzel’s grasp of character had never been equaled before his time. The Dutch masters represented one type of people. Hogarth and Wilkie, however, succeeded in improving in the direction of character-study what had been attempted before their

day. They limited themselves to certain classes also, whereas Menzel has portrayed king and peasant with inimitable faithfulness.

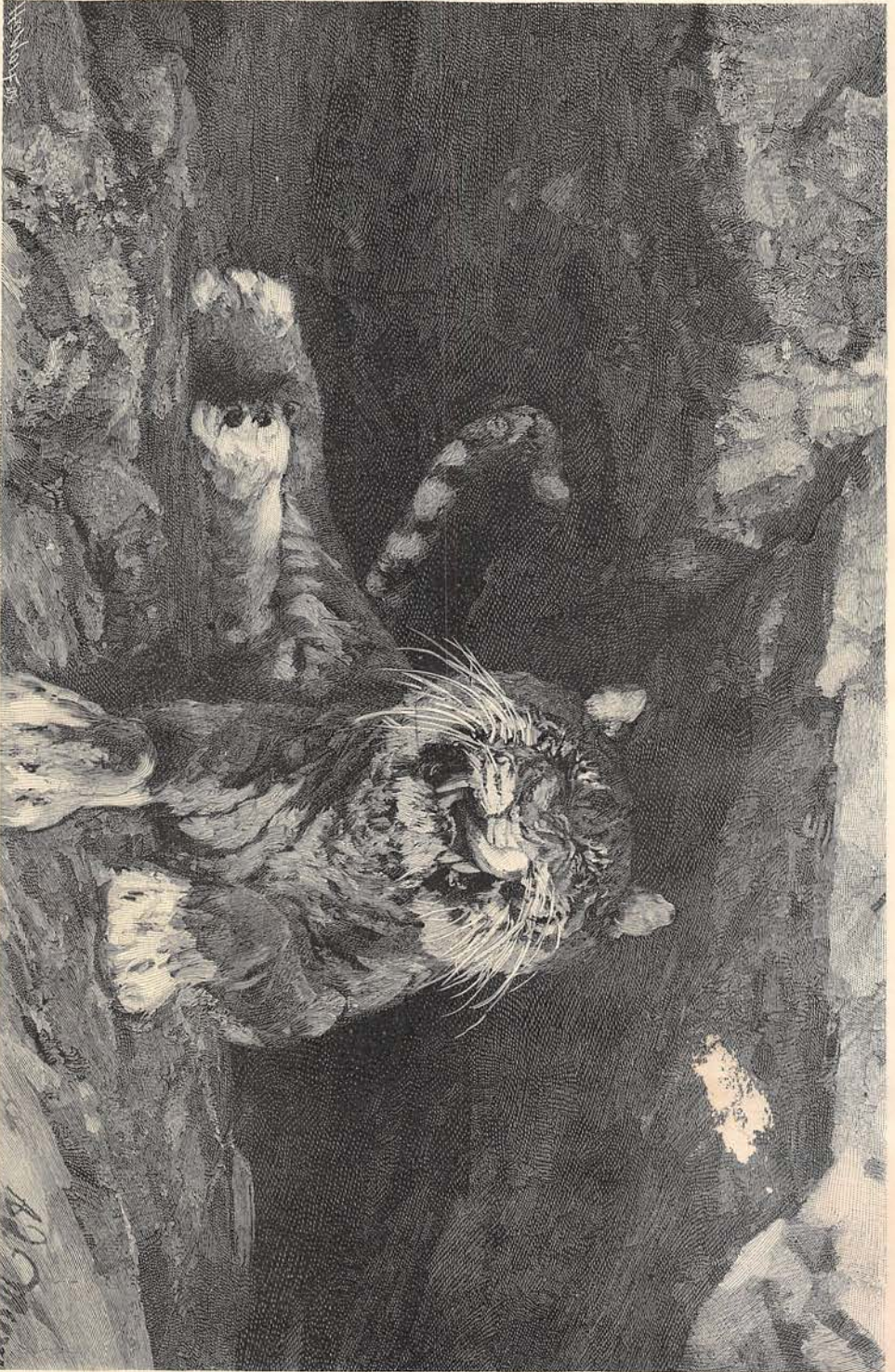
Apart from Menzel’s success as a painter of fire and artificial light, and in addition to the other qualities mentioned, he is an illustrator without a peer. His technic is as effectual and complete as it is simple and unpretentious. It is devoid of artifice or trickery, is apparently unstudied in its address, and is altogether of the careful, careless kind which is so much sighed for by many ambitious illustrators. Mr. Edwin Abbey is the most successful follower of Menzel’s pen-wielding. The late Mr. Randolph Caldecott also showed much of the good influence of this great German. A good look at the portrait of Adolf Menzel tells us much in addition to his works.—W. J. BAER.

MENZEL is one of the few shining lights of modern art, as unique in his surroundings as Jean François Millet was in his; as far above and beyond his own contemporaries as the latter was—a man who creates a school. He has been called, and not inaptly, the German Fortuny, certain tendencies, purposes, aims being akin in both, while each reserves a strong force of individuality. Truly a remarkable man when one looks at the dates on his works and considers the state of art at such times.—ROBERT BLUM.



“MAG NICHT!”

PAINTED BY A. MENZEL.



TIGER.

ENGRAVED BY H. WOLFF.