

Penmanship.

BY GEORGE CLULOW.

Nulla dies abeat quin linea ducta supersit.

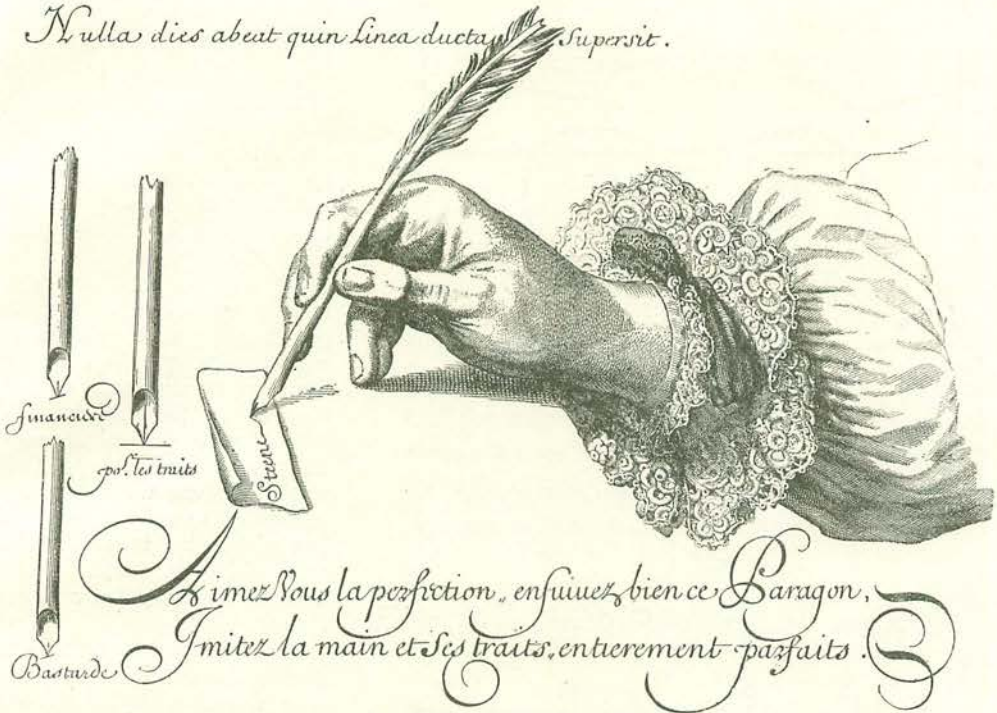


FIG. 1.—FROM VANDEN STEENE, 1637.



WHEN Sir Andrew Ague-cheek was counselled by his friend Sir Toby to write his challenge in a "martial" hand, and to taunt his opponent with the "license of ink," did he write in "Longobarda," "Bastarda," or "Cancel-

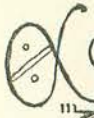
leresca"? — for so were some of the various forms of the Italian "hand" distinguished. An idle speculation this, perhaps, but it leads us to the subject of penmanship, and to recall the time when writing ranked as a gentle craft, and to illustrate by the evidences which remain to us the fact that it is worthy of being called a "fine" art.

*Vno de principal. pensieri e' el seruo di Dio ha d'bauer' e' e' e' oltra.
 Le sue orationi et essercitij spirituali. procuri molte volte di se
 uare il suo cuore a Iddio in ogni luoco et tempo et in ogni sorte
 di negotij di tal maniera e' e' si come se api di tutti i fiori e' e'
 reggono s'ingegnano di cauare alcuna cosa p' portare all' loro
 casse et farne il mele, cossi egli procuri di cauare di ciascuna cosa
 e' e' ueda o' vada materia di deuotione et amor. et laude di Dio.
 I Io: Fran.^{cus} Crescius Scribebat Roma. I*

Writing, which of all perceptive methods of conveying information from age to age may be said to best give immortality, has failed, curiously enough, to bring to us the name or period of its inventor, and we have no reply to the couplet which inquires:—

FIG. 2.—FROM CRESCIUS, 1569.




 ovo per questa prima di cambio pagate al mag^o.
 Thomasso Spica Scrittissimo Romano scudi
 cinquecento ottanta doro in oro per la valuta qua da
 Messer Lurtio di Lentulo Romano Et poneteli a conto
 vostro Et fatto il pagamento datene, hauiro. Se di al
 tre tang vi faremo Creditori. xpo di mal u guardj

Di Roma Il. xxvij. di Luglio. D. D. mcdviii.

Joannes Baptista Palatinus Suis Romanus peribatur.

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Fff Ggg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nnn Ooo
 Pp Qq Rr Ssss Tt Uu Vv Xx Yyy Zz 3 3 3 et 3 f.

FIG. 3.—FROM PALATINUS, 1539.

Whence did this wondrous mystic art arise
 Of painting speech and speaking to the eyes?
 Nahum Tate, Queen Anne's poet laureate, disposes of the puzzle enigmatically in his definition of the art as "the Pallas and Pandora of mankind."
 Penmanship—universal as it is in every condition of life and in every land, indispensable in

every social relation, and in the business of the world—has fallen away from the high position which it once held among the refinements of educated people, and no longer has place as a fine art. Notwithstanding the spread of education, and the careful administrative efforts to ensure it, it is remarkable that the writers who aim at anything beyond legibility are, if we may measure opportunity by accomplishment, a decreasing quantity, and we have the curious paradox that the higher the education—taken in its general sense—the more certainly do we find writing degenerating from the beauty of form and grace of line of which it is so capable, and which is found in the handwriting of our forefathers.

It is singular to note that, during the first hundred years after the discovery of the art of printing, as it advanced so the art of writing languished—the reproduction of MSS. books by means of the copyist being checked and finally abandoned; his occupation was gone, and fair writing became rare.

A M D L xvuy I

Nicolo Spavolo Antonio manelli et di Lyone deon dare as vlt^{ra}
 di nouembre. 1569. ducti ottocento cinquantasette s. xv. di lam.
 vecchi pagaty per lettera di camb. @ ml Sionambatt. altouity
 Et porto Raffaello cinna cassa bauere In q. afo: 322. To. 857. s. 15—
 Eady xvuy di Decemb. deon dare di xvuy. simili pag per
 loro abartolomeo cresci da s. yst. a cassa bauere in q. afo 327. To. 138 s. —

Il Cresci in Roma
 Scrucua di sua inuery.

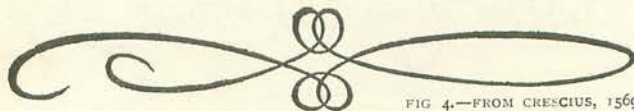


FIG. 4.—FROM CRESCIUS, 1569.

The subordinate place which writing has taken for the last half-century in the scheme of education, especially in the public schools of England, has led us to lose sight of how important a personage the writing-master was in the preceding three centuries—when he was a man of broad learning, and with a calling of deserved dignity and honour. In these later times, the wider range of teaching, under modern systems, has caused, it may well be unwisely, the partial neglect of one at least of the first items in the education of our forefathers, items which in popular speech have been grouped as “the three R’s”—accuracy of

Letter-writing in the modern sense appears to have been of very rare usage in England before the sixteenth century, for nearly all the letters which are preserved in the archives of our country prior to that period are written, not by the hand of the person whose signature they bear, but by that of the private secretary or public scribe; and before the spread of a methodized education, this profession of public scribe lived, and has in the Sister Island still some survivors. In France and Italy, and actively so in Spain, it is yet a recognised and necessary means of communication among the unlettered.

Now let us look at the evidences which



FIG. 5.—FROM VESPASIANUS, 1556.

spelling being sacrificed to euphony. Good writing was important enough to occupy the mind of the philosopher, John Locke, for we find him in the midst of his efforts towards the establishment of civil and religious liberty designing, in 1688, a set of writing copies for the use of the children of his friend, Benjamin Furley.

Eat quoz remissæ sunt iniquitates et quomodo facta sunt peccata. Beatus vir cui non imputantur domus peccatorum nec est in spiritu eius voluntas. Quomodo tamen uncti fuerunt ossa mea dum clamarem tota die. Quomodo die ac nocte. *Adoucas Cnuomus Scab.*

FIG. 6.—FROM CURIONE, 1602.

the copy-books of the last three centuries supply, of what the art of writing may be made, and see how in the rush and haste and utilitarianism of to-day we have lost the charm of form and ingenuity of design which belonged to the writing characters of three centuries ago. The school copy-books of to-day have ceased to display the beautifully varied styles of writing which were then the delight of the writing-master and the recreation of the pupil. When we look over a collection of old copy-books, the thought must come that many of these older examples, and particularly those of the sixteenth century, might again be brought into the caligraphic education and recreative teaching of our

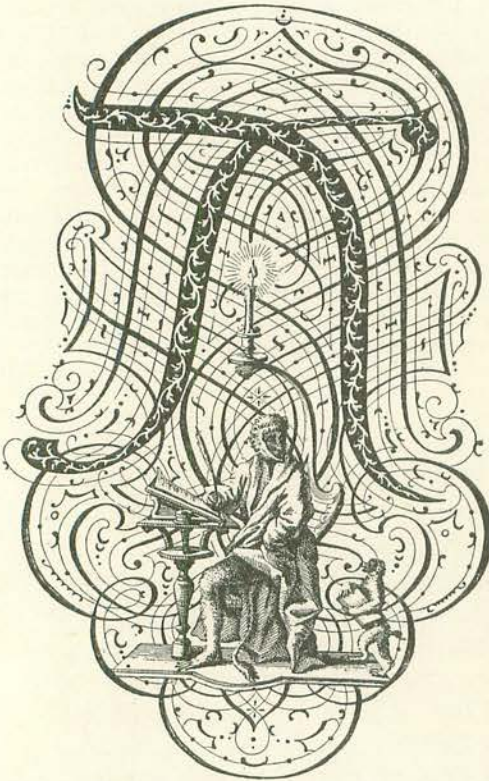


FIG. 7.—INITIAL A—ALBRECHT, 1732.

schools. In drawing, freedom and accuracy of form are the first elements in the training of the hand, and in teaching the art of writing there might be almost insensibly secured in this way these first steps to successful graphic imitation. Turn to Fig. 3 of the examples here given, a reproduction of one of the copies of Johannes Palatinus, written, as the copy tells us, on the 28th July, 1539, where he describes himself as "Civis Romanus," a title of which he was doubtless proud; and that he was so of his personal appearance we may, perhaps, assume, for to his

book he prefixes his portrait. Note the precision of form in alliance with graceful fancy in what was the ordinary mercantile character of the time, legibility and grace, hand in hand. Again, see (Fig. 5) the richly-ornamented copy from the copy-book of Vespasianus, a Neapolitan monk, whose beautiful set of writing copies was printed in 1556. In these early examples we see how carefully and thoughtfully decoration has been applied to the art of letters. Italy led the way in the production of models for writing, and, for nearly a century, gave the style to the writing-masters of other countries. The earliest English master, Peter Bales, to whom has been given the title of "Restorer of Fine Writing in England," from whom we have in 1590 the "Writing Schoolmaster," was evidently familiar with the work of his Italian *confrères*, and copied where he could not improve. After the Italian masters of the sixteenth century, living at the same time in Rome, Venice, Naples, Siena, Florence, and other Italian cities, and some examples of whose work are shown in Figs. 2, 4, and 6, writing copies were produced somewhat abundantly in England, France, Spain, Germany, and the Low Countries, but Italy was still pre-eminent in this as in other arts. The use of fanciful design as decorative adjuncts to the actual copy—birds, animals, insects, and the human figure, produced for the most part by the pen in continuous free-hand lines—culminated in the copies of Morante, a Spanish teacher of writing, and the specimen of his work, Fig. 9,



FIG. 8.—FROM VANDEN STEENE, 1627.



FIG. 9.—FROM MORANTE, 1639.

shows power of design and clever application in a high degree; the example by him, Fig. 12, is equally good in its way.

The impulse given to the liberal arts under the reigns of Louis XIII. and XIV. included penmanship, and France boasts of a group of excellent masters, one of whom, Barbedor, was in the *entourage* of the King, and had the rank of "Secrétaire de la Chambre du Roy." There are many fine examples of this period which have a distinctive special character in the use of vigorous, broad, and luxurious flourishes, revelling in freedom of hand and pen, as is seen in the example by Moreau, Fig. 11.

In the earliest of these charming copy-books we find the copies used as a means of inculcating moral lessons and worldly-wise counsel, in addition to hints on the methods of the art which they served; and in the seventeenth and next century we find the writing-master appearing as a poet, moralist, and religious teacher. That "ingenious" penman, Mr. Edward Cocker, who was arithmetician as well as writing-master, and to whom we owe the "according to Cocker" of schoolboy slang, was not less amusing in the poetical efforts shown in his copies than he was admirable in the style of the writing set for imitation; but we cannot but respect

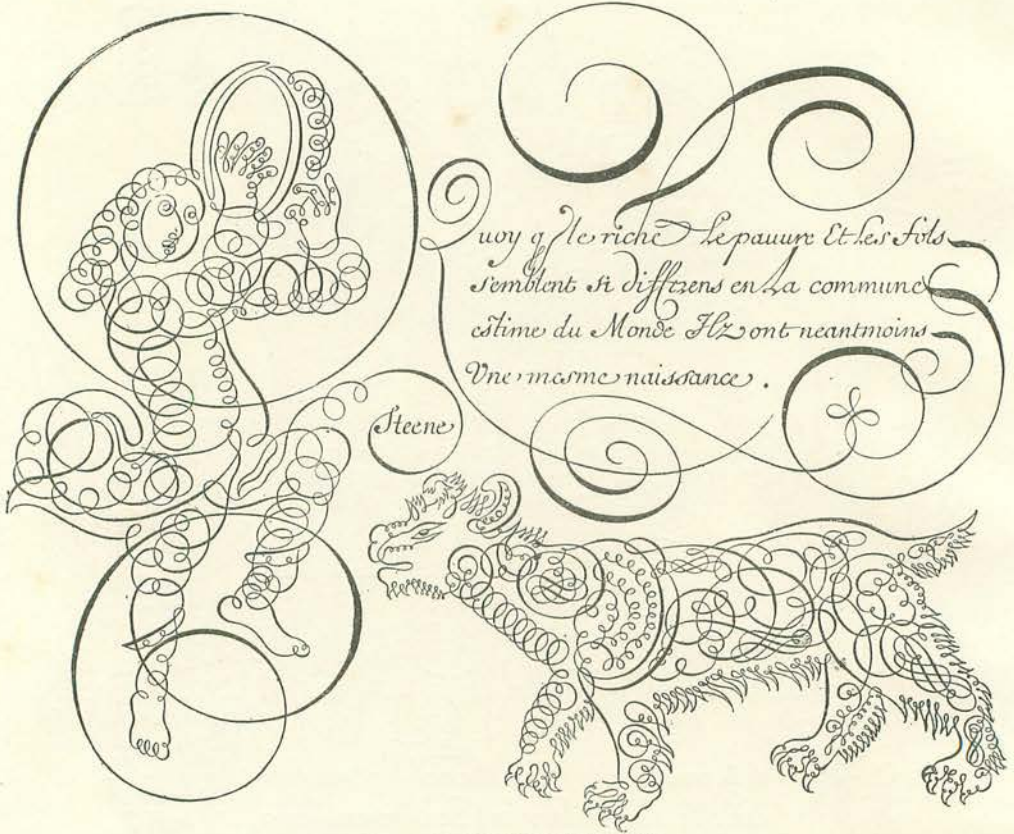


FIG. 10.—FROM VANDEN STEENE, 1687.

the healthy spirit and firm faith in the teaching which he imparts. His work is dainty and decorative, and, as a whole, is the best of his period.

Germany had its special school of writ-

ing-masters, who appear to have worked independently of the models of the Italian masters, though we can trace their large indebtedness to them. While there is ample facility

of design shown in their copy-books, they lack the grace and charm of their westward and southern neighbours. Nuremberg produced the best of them, but from other parts of Germany we have good examples. At Lubeck, in 1647, Arnold Möller issued his "Scribstubelein"; and in variety and painstaking treatment they afford a fair example of the German copies of the first half of the seventeenth century. From the Nuremberg master, Albrecht, we have a clever series of initials, of which the letter A (Fig. 7) is here shown, and they

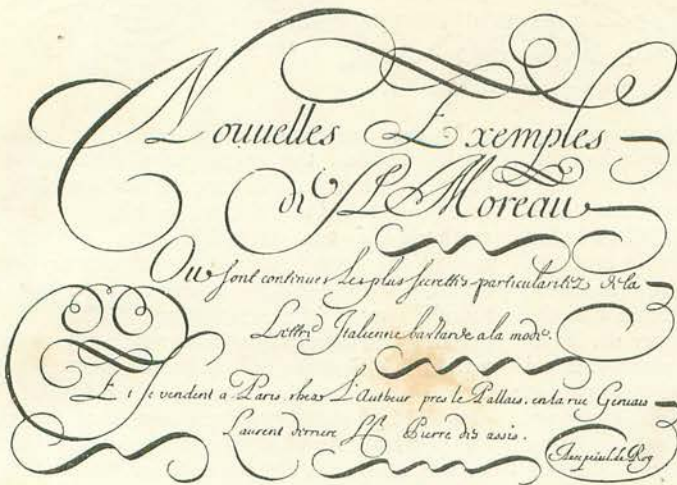


FIG. 11.—FROM MOREAU, 1632.



FIG. 12.—FROM MORANTE, 1639.

are worth study as showing the possible elaboration of penmanship. Our readers may perhaps remember an example of his work in a former article upon "Playing Cards." A very notable writing-master of this period was Vanden Steene, of Ghent, who, in 1687, issued his "Schrijf-const," and where, with much originality of his own, he has worked on the methods of the Italian and French masters. In Figs. 8 and 10 we have representative examples of his

copies, which show the freedom and fancy with which he worked. The illustration at the head of this article is from his book, and shows the position of the fingers in holding the pen, and the "nibs" necessary or best suited for writing the different "hands" set for imitation. In his, as in the other copies we have mentioned, there is found the same effort to educate the mind as well as the hand by useful maxims of daily application and of eulogy of the art of penmanship.



FIG. 13.—PORTRAIT OF JOHANNES FRANCA PALATINO, 1539.