

Have You an Old Print Worth a Fortune?



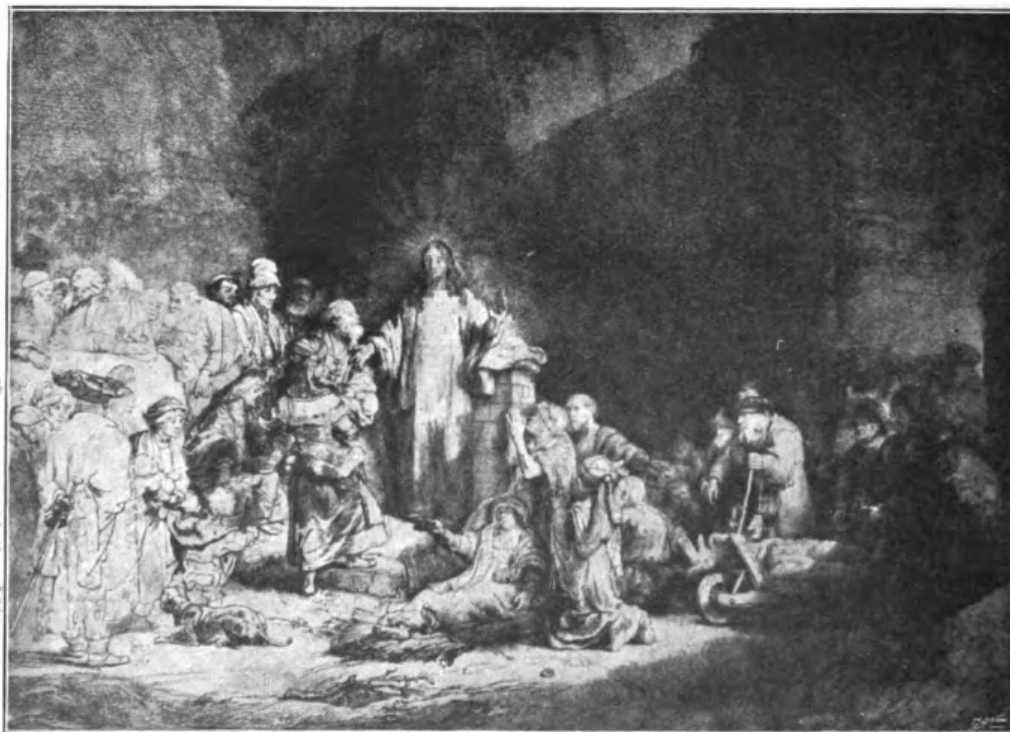
THE perversity of things in general was well exemplified the other day when a gentleman walked into a small shop in a large provincial town and purchased, for the small sum of 30s., two fine prints which had attracted his notice in passing. These same prints he afterwards showed to a London dealer, who immediately offered him £400 for one, or £700 for the pair; but their fortunate possessor declined to part with them at any price, as they were both rare states of the finest mezzotints that ever came into the market, and two he had long sought for in vain. The irony of the transaction lay in the fact that the lucky purchaser was a millionaire and the dealer a poor man in a very small way of business.

That there are numbers of similar treasures still undiscovered there is very little doubt,

with its illustrations, may be the means of bringing some of these to light, and of making their owners happy with unexpected riches.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the value of old prints has increased by leaps and bounds; prints which in the earlier part of the century could be purchased for a few shillings now realize hundreds of pounds; and these present high prices are likely to be maintained, if not exceeded; for, with the spread of education, the improvement in public taste, and the small chance of its being met and satisfied by contemporary art, the demand is sure to grow, while the supply will naturally become more and more limited.

Among the highest priced of these old prints those by Rembrandt rank first; several of these run into four figures, and foremost among them is that which forms



THE "HUNDRED GUILDER PLATE." BY REMBRANDT.—PRINTS WORTH £1,750.

for they turn up every now and again in the most unexpected places, and sometimes in the most remote districts, the owners in many cases being absolutely ignorant of the value of their possession, and often equally so of their artistic merits. Possibly this article,

our first illustration, commonly known as the "Hundred Guilder Plate." An impression in the first state of this wonderful print, which has never been equalled for its technical excellence or its marvellous chiaroscuro effects, was sold at a public auction in

1893 for the large sum of £1,750. Yet in 1769 this same print was to be had for the modest amount of £27, and in Rembrandt's own time for forty-eight guilders. The plate is said to have been etched by the artist to clear off a debt of one hundred guilders, or about eight guineas of our own money. However that may be, the name it acquired through the tradition still clings to it, and is now very unlikely to be shaken off. This



REMBRANDT'S PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF.—PRINTS WORTH £2,000.

print is the envy of all collectors, and so eager was one enthusiast to possess a good impression of it, if only for an hour, that it was purchased on his account at a sale in 1867, though he lay at the time on his death-bed. As the last one likely to come into the market has now been disposed of, unless, as I have said before, one happens to lie hidden away in some remote corner of the world, would-be purchasers may set their minds at rest, and turn their attention to others equally desirable if somewhat less expensive.

Another very highly priced print by the same artist is his own portrait, which, although not perhaps of the

plates of this description, for decoration or presentation, and since revived in our own with very satisfactory results.



"MRS. BAMPFYLDE." BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.—PRINTS WORTH ABOUT £800.

same interest to the general observer as the preceding, nevertheless commands a still higher figure, the last offered for sale realizing the very extraordinary price of £2,000. The rarity of it in this particular state accounts for its high market value, only four such being known in the world. The plate was afterwards cut down to an oval, as if for insertion into a frame, not at all an uncommon way in those days of treating copper-

A different class of print, and one with which many people are much more familiar, is the portrait of "Mrs. Bampfylde," a beautiful lady of the Georgian period, whose husband was shot in 1823 in Montague Street, Mayfair, by a miscreant, who afterwards committed suicide. She had long been separated from her husband, but hurried to his side when this unfortunate occurrence took place, and never left him till he died a few days after. Her son, John Codrington Bampfylde, a poet, fell in love with a niece of Sir Joshua

Reynolds, with whom she lived. Sir Joshua objected to the match and closed his doors upon the young aspirant, who thereupon smashed his windows, and was duly rewarded by being sent to Newgate. This fine print, which was published in 1779, was engraved by T. Watson from a picture of the lady painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1777; in its finest state its price varies from 750 to 880 guineas.

Equally fine, and of the same class as the former, is that of the "Ladies Waldegrave,"

for the possession of which there is always a struggle whenever an impression is in the market. It was originally published at a guinea, but now fetches easily from £500 to £600. The print is large, and was engraved from a famous picture by Reynolds. The three beautiful young ladies represented so busily engaged upon the fashionable occupation of the day were the daughters of Maria Countess

Waldegrave, whose father, Sir Edward Walpole, so the tale runs, was so affected by the



"THE LADIES WALDEGRAVE." BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.—
PRINTS WORTH £500 TO £600.



"MRS. ABINGTON." BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.—
PRINTS WORTH £200 TO £300.



"MRS. PELHAM." BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.—
PRINTS WORTH £200 TO £300.

sad story of a poor sewing-girl, employed by a Pall Mall tailor, that he took her under his protection. She eventually died, leaving three daughters, of whom the mother of this lovely trio was the second. This lady afterwards became Duchess of Gloucester, and thus did the daughter of a seamstress become closely allied to the English throne.

Of "Mrs. Abington," "Mrs. Pelham," and "Mrs. Carnac" there are doubtless numbers of impressions, though they are not often seen in the market, but when they do appear are eagerly contended for.

The first-named is a fine portrait of that charming actress of whom it was said that her taste in dress was so exquisite that she was consulted in this particular by many ladies of the highest rank; yet she was supposed to have been originally only a flower-seller in St. James's Park, where she was known by the name of "Nosegay Fan." The two others were society ladies of the same period, both noted for their beauty and other charming qualities. The latest price paid for a fine print of "Mrs. Carnac" reached the enormous sum of £1,160, at a recent sale at Christie's.

The beautiful print of the "Daughters of Sir T. Frankland" is from a picture by John Hoppner of two of Admiral Frankland's children, of whom there were nineteen. In its finest state it commands from £400 to £500, though poor impressions are some-



"MRS. CARNAC," BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.—
PRINTS WORTH
£1,000 TO £1 160.

times sold for as many shillings. The figures quoted here have even been exceeded in transactions of a more private nature, and this same remark applies to the majority of the rare prints here reproduced, with the single exception of the Rembrandts.

"St. James's Park" and "A Tea Garden" are illustrations of London life at the close of the eighteenth century. Both scenes were no doubt familiar enough in their day, and but for the difference in costume, with regard to that of "St. James's," is



"THE DAUGHTERS OF SIR T. FRANKLAND," BY JOHN HOPPNER.—
PRINTS WORTH £400 TO £500.



"ST. JAMES'S PARK." BY GEORGE MORLAND.—PRINTS WORTH £200 TO £300.

so still, for both the professions represented remain faithful to the traditions of their respective callings and follow in the footsteps of their eighteenth century predecessors. It

is, however, scarcely possible to realize that the sylvan scene represented in our next illustration is in the vicinity of what is now the busy and thickly-populated district of King's



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 "A TEA GARDEN." BY GEORGE MORLAND.—PRINTS WORTH £200 TO £300.
 UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Cross, yet such is the fact, for the scene is laid in the gardens of the once famous Bagnigge Wells, at that time quite outside London. An off-day spent at these gardens was considered by the average citizen as good as a day in the country at any time. These two prints were issued in 1790, and, being cleverly printed in colour, became very popular. They are now much sought after, on account of their decorative qualities, a good pair realizing from two to three hundred guineas; a price for which one hundred times as many could have been purchased only a few years ago.

"The Pledge of Love," a pretty print after one of George Morland's pictures, is both popular and good, which is not



"LADY RUSHOUT AND HER DAUGHTER." BY ANGETINA KAUFMANN, R.A.—PRINTS WORTH ABOUT £220.

£220. "Miss Farren," however, is a good second, with a recent bid of £185, while "Mrs. Siddons" is fast rising in value, a proof in the first state jumping from thirty guineas in 1887 to £150 in 1900.



"THE PLEDGE OF LOVE." BY GEORGE MORLAND.—PRINTS WORTH ABOUT £300.

always the case with regard to those prints which command the largest prices. This one is very rarely to be met with, having become very scarce, through its popularity when first issued; it now sells for £300 and upwards, an impression printed in colour realizing £304 within the last year.

"Lady Rushout and Her Daughter," "Miss Farren," and "Mrs. Siddons," printed in colour, all run each other very closely in the matter of price, though the first-mentioned is at present first favourite, a fine impression of this print having recently been sold for



"MRS. SIDDONS."—PRINTS WORTH ABOUT £150.

The insignificant little print which follows these, the original of which is only about 4in. by 3in., is one of the finest examples extant for showing to what lengths enthusiasts allow themselves to be carried when pursuing, with an ardour an outsider can never hope to understand, this favourite hobby of print-collecting. It is another work of that prince of artists, the celebrated Rembrandt, and was probably etched by him in some moment of leisure, while this favourite little dog of his lay asleep in his studio. Its origin is certainly accidental, for he has evidently seized for his purpose the first bit of prepared copper that came to hand, and this being too large for his subject, he used, no doubt from motives of economy, only one corner of the plate. In this state he took but one impression, afterwards cutting out the corner, and taking all others from this reduced plate. It is from the first impression, taken before the plate was cut, that our illustration is taken, the only one in the world. For many years past it has been the ambition of all great collectors to possess this unique little print, and it was in consequence of this that each

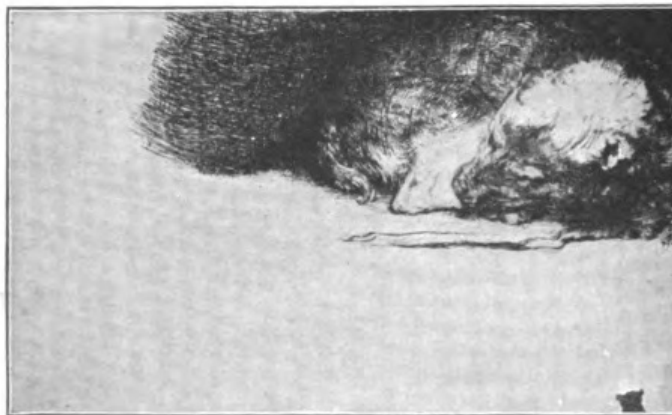
time it appeared in the market it advanced in price, until from £1 10s. paid for it in 1809 it reached in 1842 the ridiculously large sum for so little worth of £120, or about £10 per square inch. For this price it was purchased for one of our national institutions, where it now rests in security, free from the busy hum of the auction mart and the rivalry of would-be possessors.

There are, of course, many other fine prints equally valuable that might be mentioned, but in all cases, in order to attain the extraordinary prices mentioned here, it is necessary that they should be in the finest proof state and best possible condition. A unique collection, such as here brought together, would then realize the respectable sum of £9,000 or £10,000; an amount calcu-

lated to inspire many with a desire to turn over once more, in the hope of discovering similar treasures, the contents of old chests, cupboards, and other hitherto unexplored nooks and corners of the family possessions, always a fascinating employment, even without the zest which such "great expectations" would naturally impart to it.



"MISS FARREN." BY SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE.—
PRINTS WORTH ABOUT £185.



REMBRANDT'S "LITTLE DOG."—PRINTS WORTH ABOUT £120.