

The Post-War Influence On Calligraphy

From about the year 1930 calligraphy writing and lettering had made such progress that it had become a subject in the training of Art Teachers and was taught by the immediate followers of the two who had given their lives to its cause. Lettering of Today, first volume, published in 1937, showed the work of some of these who had taken up the craft and were in their turn passing it on to the new generation. Under post-war conditions the subject suffered a setback; writing materials had suddenly become scarce and expensive. The supply of quills, which had been so good and plentiful from Russia and Canada, was completely cut off. They were large turkey and Hudson Bay goose. Indian ink, which had been imported from New York in convenient one-ounce bottles, was no longer in stock, and Chinese "stick" from those who had made it for centuries had been reduced to small end pieces almost too small to hold and grind. England has never produced a thin black ink suitable for both small and large manuscript writing; those made here have either been off-black or too thickly charged with gum to produce a really thin fine quill stroke on vellum. Various trades had used hematite burnishers in the course of their work, such as the burnishing of gilded edges of books and the brightening of silverware that had been gilt. These burnishers had been found to be the best tools for the work of the manuscript gilder, and a number of scribes bought from trade suppliers or had them cut and polished in Germany. This supply has been cut off for ten years. Vellum could still be bought as it was a product of our own; but the quality was different. The finest raw hides came from Scandinavia and these were denied us by the Government; in consequence modern writing has greatly suffered. The trend of calligraphy today is that it has fallen away from the idiosyncrasies of Graily Hewitt and mainly follows the general line laid down by Edward Johnston; there are, however, certain exceptions and differences creeping in which are inevitable. This was expected and often encouraged by him when he talked of the future. He had examined the work of past generations, learned what they had to teach and then based his alphabets and concepts of page design on the whole of the mediaeval movement, from early growth, middle glory and final decay. A few modern scribes have done the same in some measure, the result of which can be seen in the following pages. The majority have learned and followed what they have been taught by the early followers of Edward Johnston and, as it is to be expected, have lost a certain amount in the process. Some have clung to the middle period of his work while others have been interested in what he produced in the latter part of his life; some have interpreted, some have misunderstood: but for the most part writers have chosen the alphabets which rely on the swift-stroke of the pen rather than those which were based on early Roman MSS. such as uncials, or the insular half-uncials of the Lindisfarne Gospels. The result has been that the italic hands are favored and that the Foundational Hand, which Edward Johnston founded on, a tenth-century psalter has sometimes been given an italic bias.

About the Author

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