



EXTRACT FROM THE „MANCHESTER GUARDIAN”

SEPTEMBER 24TH 1845.

THE LATE G. A. ESCHER, ESQ. OF ZURICH.

(From a Correspondent.)

We noticed in our obituary of Wednesday last, the death of this lamented and accomplished gentleman. A few more particulars respecting his brief career, will doubtless be acceptable to our readers. Mr. Escher was born at Zurich on the 13th of March, 1807. His parents, Casper Escher and Anna de Muralt, belonged to the most respectable families of that republic. His father being originally destined for an architect, had pursued his professional studies in Rome and the south of Italy; but on visiting England, about 30 years ago, his attention was strongly called to manufacturing industry, and this circumstance led to a change in the direction of his career. His early taste, however, remained with him, and was communicated to his son; and to its influence must be ascribed the constant effort of both of them, in their undertakings as engineers, to combine a certain artistic beauty of outward effect with the utmost simplicity and completeness of mechanical construction. In 1823, the elder Mr. Escher brought his only son with him to this country, intending to place him in some school in the south of England, to acquire the English language; but finding the different establishments which he visited for this purpose decidedly inferior to the excellent school which his son had just quitted at Zurich, he finally determined on leaving him in Manchester, where he had the benefit of private tuition, to study mechanics under Mr. Bodmer, an eminent engineer, also a citizen of Zurich. This arrangement fixed the tastes and determined the future course of young Escher. The latent energy of his character, which had not yet assumed any decided manifestation, was awakened and drawn out by the innumerable objects of interest exhibited in this vast theatre of industry, and by the vague prospects of honourable ambition which now broke for the first time on his opening mind. He saw the path which lay before him, and resolved to pursue it. Having been introduced by his father to the heads of the principal manufacturing and engineering establishments of Manchester, who soon discerned his remarkable aptitude for mechanics, he was freely admitted into their mills and workshops, where he soon made himself acquainted with the various processes employed, and acquired, at an early age, an extraordinary amount of practical knowledge. The youth already gave full promise of the future man. He united, at this period of his early life (we write from the vivid recollections of habitual intercourse), with remarkable acuteness of perception, that seized at once upon the main point of the question under consideration, and with a vigilance and readiness of apprehension, which appropriated, as if by instinct, everything worth notice in reading or conversation, and converted it into available knowledge—dispositions the most amiable and generous, a spirit full of life and enjoyment, and manners singularly frank and unassuming, which tempered the effect of his very superior intellectual endowments, and greatly endeared him to his friends. The two years spent by him in Manchester, from the 16th to the 18th year of his age, were devoted to the preparatory studies of his career with an assiduity which overtaken his strength, and perhaps laid the foundations of the disease under which he prematurely sank. In 1825 he

returned home, and joined his father in the spinning and engineering establishments conducted by him at Zurich. A workshop of limited extent had been set up by the elder Mr. Escher, to supply himself and some of his friends with machinery for some of their mills. But this department of the business gradually increased; and new impulse was given to it by the enterprise and ability of his son, fresh from the stimulating example and gigantic undertakings of England. Mr. Albert Escher was employed for some time, as an engineer, at Naples and Vienny, draining marshy tracts and constructing water courses; and was particularly active in planning and establishing mills in different parts of Austria, for which his father's concern at Zurich fabricated the machinery. Between the years 1834 and 1836, the two Mr. Eschers were very successful in developing a manufacturing interest in Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. About 1834, they opened a new field of enterprise by the introduction of iron steam-boats on the Swiss lakes. In the first instance, the shells only of these vessels were constructed by Messrs. Escher and Co. the engines being furnished by Mr. W. Fairbairn, of Manchester, who had long been a personal friend of the family. At length, however, it was thought better to fit out the boats entirely at Zurich — an arrangement which gave new scope and activity to the operations of the native workshops for mechanics; and at the present day, we are informed, the principal lakes of Switzerland and the north of Italy, as well as the Danube, are navigated by iron steamers from the manufactory of Messrs. Escher. Travellers, struck with the singular beauty and perfection of these boats (those on the Danube are said to be particularly admired), have often expressed astonishment, and even incredulity, on being told that they were brought out of the mountains of Switzerland, a region to which nature has grudged the iron and the coal, on a ready and abundant supply of which engineering skill would seem to be entirely dependent. The complete success with which all these difficulties were surmounted is a striking proof of the fertile resources, the ingenuity, the energy, and the perseverance which Mr. Escher brought to bear on every project which he took in hand. In 1839, he strengthened his connection with England by marrying Annie, the youngest daughter of John Kennedy, Esq. of Ardwick. Soon after this event, by an arrangement with Mr. Peter Fairbairn, another respected friend of his family, he introduced machinery for the spinning of flax into Switzerland and Wurtemberg — into the latter country at the express wish, and under the immediate patronage, of the present king, who was desirous of encouraging that branch of industry in his dominions. He also introduced machinery for the manufacture of paper. The products of the Zurich workshops — steam-boats and machines of various kinds — are now, we understand, widely diffused in various parts of Europe, from the south of Italy, through Germany and Hungary, northward into Russia. In these extended enterprises the father and the son acted together with the most perfect harmony, and seemed governed by one spirit. The bold conceptions of the latter carried out beyond their original limits the more cautious projects of the older man; but these, once approved and adopted, were taken up and executed by the father with the calm and patient energy of an unbroken age. Often in his last illness, when disabled from sharing the burdens which his own ambition had imposed, Mr. Escher was heard to express his thankful admiration of the vigour and cheerfulness with which the whole weight of them was sustained by his father. Efforts like these to develop useful industry, to multiply the comforts and conveniences of life, to facilitate communication between distant regions, and to combine with a provision of the means of regular occupation and subsistence for increasing multitudes, a benevolent attention to their social condition and moral welfare, — entitle men to the reverence and gratitude of their contemporaries, and constitute them the true civilisers of their kind, — breaking up new fields from which industry, guided by science, shall gather in rich future harvests, and destined to that place in the homage of a more enlightened era, which has been often

less rationally conceded to the subjugator and slaughterer of his fellow-men. Mr. Escher's constitution was unequal to the tasks which he laid upon it. A noble ambition of excellence in all things — a determination to let nothing poor and imperfect pass from his hands and have the sanction of his name — sometimes urged him to exertions far beyond his strength; and at length a disease in the vital organs manifested itself, which his medical advisers, long before his decease, pronounced incurable. His career, brief as it was, was honourable, successful, and happy; and the impression of it in the memory of surviving friends, while mingled with deep regret for his early removal from a world which he was so well fitted to adorn and improve, will ever be delightful. Energy, united with patience and enterprise, tempered by thoughtfulness, were marked features in his character. To the grace of courteous and attractive manners he added warm and pure affections, and a high toned firmness of moral principle which never swerved from the line of strict integrity. The man was a natural expression of the spirited and ingenuous boy. Large intercourse with the world had not weakened the force or corrupted the simplicity either of his moral sentiments or of his religious convictions. In the strong consciousness of both, he assured his friends he found unspeakable consolation in his last hours. To England he had ever been devotedly attached. It was to him a second country. Here, in youth, he had met with a new home, and acquired the tastes which decided his future course; here, in the bloom of manhood, he had formed the connection which exercised the happiest influence on his private life; and hither, when warned by invincible disease of his approaching end, he came, attended by his wife and child, to find in the presence of early friends an untimely grave.

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