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THE  
PORTFOLIO

MONOGRAPHS ON ARTISTIC SUBJECTS  
WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS  
PUBLISHED MONTHLY



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February, 1895

The Art of  
William Quiller  
Orchardson

by

WALTER ARMSTRONG



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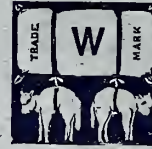
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THE ART OF  
WILLIAM QUILLER  
ORCHARDSON

*By*

WALTER ARMSTRONG

*Director of the National Gallery of Ireland*



LONDON

SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED, ESSEX STREET, STRAND

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1895



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# THE ART OF WILLIAM QUILLER ORCHARDSON

R.A.

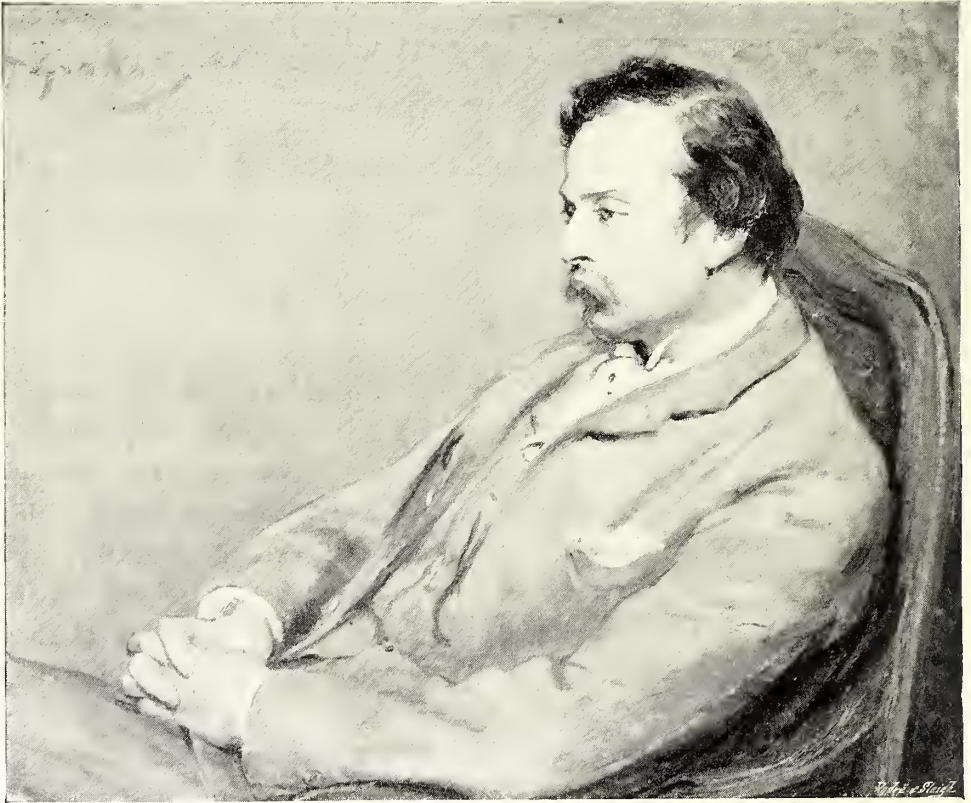
## I

“IT is difficult to believe that any man is able to do first-rate things both in subjective and objective work.” I stumbled upon this sentence the other day in a review of Louis Stevenson’s romances, and I fancy it embodies a notion acceptable to the superficial observer, to the critic who works by individual comparisons, by canons, and, generally, by avoiding views either broad or deep in judging a work of art. And yet it amounts to little less than a denial of possible solution to the one problem which every artist has to solve before he can become efficient, not to say great. If a fairly complete work of art, in any medium whatever, is not a happily consummated union between elements objective and elements subjective, each being duly controlled, it will be difficult indeed to say what it is.

Let me try to illustrate this by following the successive stages in the making of an artist, as the process would appear to himself were it conscious and deliberate.

The boy begins, as soon as he can look, by taking an interest in the life he sees in action about him. It is not by objects in themselves that his senses are excited; it is by their movement, their variation, the presage they give of some awakening power within himself. He is like a young cat. His indifference to things which give no sign

of life is profound. It is only when they move that he is struck by the notion that possibly they might in some way be made to gratify his own passions. The first enjoyment he receives through his outward instinct is that of destruction. When he gets old enough to handle things, the only vent for his desire to assimilate them, to make them part



*W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A. From a painting by T. Graham.  
By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*

of his *ego*, is to pull them to pieces, to punish their unresponsiveness by summary execution. Between this stage and the next there is a period during which the boy does not know what to be at. In him the girl's instinct for protection is only feebly developed. He knows no middle course between destruction and creation. The months between the last wilful disembowelling and the first attempt to "make"

are passed, as a rule, in the persecution of every living thing he comes across. At last the time arrives to give him paints and pencils. What does he do with them? Does he put a vase of flowers on a table and sit down to study its forms? No; he tries to recreate the life by which he has been fascinated all along. He wearied of his tin cavalry because it could not charge, of his popguns because they had neither noise nor smoke. And so he tries to make action of every kind visible. Purely objective fact has no existence for him. What he wants to realize is his own conception of how things should move and what patterns they should make. If Wellington drew a battle for him, he would insist on more smoke; or Fordham a racehorse, he would want more flash of mane and tail. The boy who tries for correctness in these early stages never becomes an artist. His untutored ambition, if it is to lead to much, has to be of the subjective, creative, self-assertive kind.

Now comes the crisis. The boy has carried his natural light as far as it will go. He has made men fight as furiously and horses gallop as extravagantly as he can with his scanty knowledge of either. He begins to see that if he is ever to express himself fully and to satisfy his own nascent critical sense, he must lay aside imagination and turn for a time to acquisition. This is the parting of the ways. To some, conditions oppose an impassable barrier; to others, the prospect of seven years or so, spent in work with no obvious charm of its own, is too appalling to face; to the few, the prize at the end has such attractions that they begin their sap cheerfully, and their toil is sweetened by the discovery, at every step gained, how science ministers to art, and elaborates a language for her use. The consummation of it all, even with the greatest artists, does not come too soon. It does not come until the scientific foundation is fused, as it were, into the art built upon it. The expressive artist must put his knowledge of form, of structure, of the behaviour of paint or clay, into action, as unconsciously as the orator does his knowledge of grammar; and this he cannot do, as a rule, until long after the years of confessed pupilage are over. The early works of nearly all painters are more scientific and objective than artistic and subjective. Creation only begins when the two qualities acquire their due proportions, or, to put it concretely

and with some triviality, when he can both paint a lemon and make it indispensable to a picture.

Much confusion of ideas has been caused by the failure both of artists and theorizers about æsthetics to recognize that every so-called work of art is a combination of art and science. The connection of the two is so intimate that you may watch a painter at work, and of successive brush-strokes you may say, "That is for art, but that for science." Every touch governed by the necessity for objective truth must obviously be referred to science; those which go to express individual preferences, personal conceptions, and sensuous predilections, which go, in short, to complete the subjective envelope in which the artist desires to clothe his facts, belong to the side of art. All this may sound very elementary, but it is curious how seldom any serious attempt has been made to trace out the real line of demarcation between art and science. The reason, perhaps, is that so many of those who have written upon such matters have failed to begin by learning to know a work of art when they see it, while those who have done so have been unwilling to acknowledge the very large share of science in the equipment of the artist. It is not too much to say that nine tenths of the labour bestowed on a picture, and, I should say, ninety-nine hundredths of that given to a statue, is not artistic but scientific labour. Of course it varies very considerably with different men. In the pictures of Dürer, for instance, the scientific, and in those of Velasquez the artistic, element would be in greater proportions than those mentioned above.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the process of creating a work of art the artist is, then, moved by a double force, the subjective and the objective. Were artists in the habit of analyzing their impulses, this would have been acknowledged long ago. Unfortunately they very seldom do anything of the kind, and the exceptions, as a rule, are not the best artists. So we have to do without their help. In the few cases I have known of self-analyzing painters I have found that the more persistent difficulty which attends the scientific side of their work inclines them enormously to exaggerate

<sup>1</sup> It is curious to realize that the proportion of art in the total result becomes greater as we sink in the precedence of the arts. Painting, sculpture, and architecture are, when measured quantitatively, rather sciences than arts, while, for instance, the designing of decorative patterns is almost purely artistic.

its importance in philosophizing on the whole question. The mature artist does the artistic part easily—nay, almost unconsciously. In the case of those with vivid imaginations—with exceptional powers of creating a mental *imago*—it is mostly done in their heads before a touch is put upon the canvas. Little remains to be determined after the palette is on the thumb beyond those modulations of detail and personal accents in handling which make for unity and concentration. And yet, easy as it may be to those who can do it at all, it is by the fabrication of a subjective envelope for its collection of objective facts that a work of art becomes a work of art. The most delightful painters—to narrow the arts to the one which more directly concerns us here—are those who have the finest sense of proportion between the two elements, those who are gifted with the most subtle instinct as to how much truth of the objective kind is required to leaven that subjective truth upon which alone artistic excellence is founded. I say the “most delightful” advisedly. We apply the word “great” too often to men with some single faculty developed out of all measure with the rest to make it a happy epithet for those who, like Pieter de Hooch, Watteau, Chardin, Fragonard, Gainsborough (to take the first names which occur to me), and the man to whom the following pages are devoted, William Quiller Orchardson, have combined outward and inward truths in the most exquisite proportions.

BEFORE attempting to give the very slight sketch of Orchardson's career which alone seems to me desirable during a painter's lifetime, it is necessary to dwell a little on the artistic *milieu* out of which he sprang.

The beginnings of organized art teaching are even more difficult to follow in Scotland than in England. Their first remote impetus was given as far back as 1700, in the Act by which the two kingdoms were united. By that Act certain sums were secured to the northern kingdom for the purpose, among others, of nursing the national manufactures. In course of time such an employment of the money became a work of supererogation, and at last, through various changes, part of it was used for the upkeep of a school of design, which was known as the Trustees' Academy. This academy lasted down to our own time, for it was not until 1858 that it was bisected, as it were, the more elementary classes being put under the rod of South Kensington, and the more advanced under that of the Royal Scottish Academy. Down to the year 1850 nearly all the masters appointed by the Board of Trustees had been men whose sympathies lay with the drier and more "classical" forms of art, men whose influence still survives in the work of most Scottish painters whose education was completed in the first half of the century. In 1850 an appointment was made which changed all this, and did more than anything else to impress upon Scottish painting the character most of us still associate with the title of the school. Robert Scott Lauder was selected for the Mastership of the Trustees' Academy. At the time of his appointment he was forty-seven years of age. He had himself been a pupil of the academy under Andrew Wilson—whose work shows more than a slight affinity with that of his more famous

namesake, Richard—and had afterwards studied in London and Italy. Lauder's own style proves that his chief attention abroad had been given to the Venetians; that, as soon as he found himself under the sun of Italy, he had promptly turned his back upon those severer masters who had



*Study from the Nude.*

*By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*

monopolized earlier generations of Scots. He settled afterwards for a time in London, and there painted a Crucifixion which at least contained one original idea: the figure of Christ was entirely draped in a white cloth. The picture excited great interest at the time, but where it now

is I do not know. There is a large but weak picture in the Scottish National Gallery which shows his preoccupation with colour and allows his faculty for its treatment to be divined. I have seen small things by him which rise to a very high level indeed. Mr. John Hutchison, the sculptor, has a picture of still life which glows like a gem.

Lauder revolutionized the Trustees' Academy. He set himself to teach the students how to see. He insisted upon a grasp of the model as a whole, in all its relations of line and colour. Possibly he carried this too far, and may have to bear the blame for some of the vagueness, the apparent inability to define, which hangs about not a few of his pupils. But at least he brought them up to see things broadly and in their places, and to get quality in their colour. Besides Mr. Orchardson, he had among his scholars Robert Herdman, George Paul Chalmers, and John Pettie, who are dead, as well as Mr. Peter Graham, Mr. Tom Graham, Mr. Hugh Cameron, Mr. W. M'Taggart, and Mr. Macwhirter. All these men, and several more who might be named, have a decisive school affinity to each other. They bear the mark of one influence so strongly that their connection could be recognized at a glance, and, in fact, their common features were accepted as the distinctive *cachet* of the Scottish school until the recent sudden birth of a new style in Glasgow. The completeness with which he instilled his ideas into a regiment of students shows Robert Lauder to have been no common man, especially as, according to his friends, he belonged to the *douce* type of Scotsman. In any case, his was the influence which created the school of Scottish painting which will be chiefly associated with the second half of the present century. To him belongs the credit of putting an end to the period of conventionality in conception and heavy-handed dirtiness in execution which marks so much of the work done before his time. His system may not have been thorough. It is more than doubtful whether many young men could have been found in the Edinburgh of forty years ago to bear a thorough system. But it was healthy; it awakened and kept awake the interest of the student, and it enabled him to produce work which could at least arouse interest in others. I have ventured upon this sketch of his career because, without it, the very marked general character of the crop of painters to which Orchardson belongs would be left without any reasonable explanation.



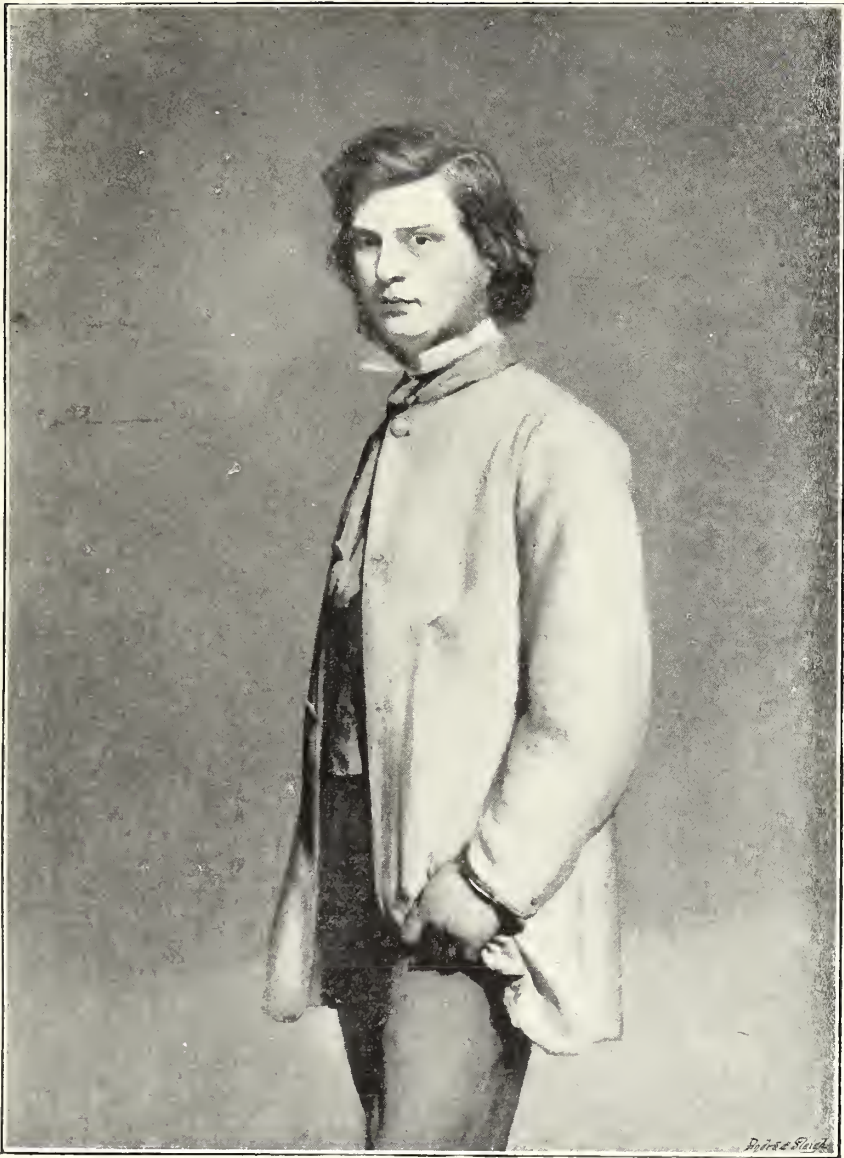
### III

THE somewhat uncommon patronymic of Orchardson is a corruption of Urquhartson, the name of a Highland clan, or rather sept, on the shores of Loch Ness, from which the painter traces his origin. His second christian name, Quiller, points to a strain of Austrian blood, inherited through his mother, to which it pleases those who discover foreign roots for everything artistic in this country to ascribe his genius. His father, who was engaged in business in Edinburgh, sent him to the Trustees' Academy in 1850, when he was fifteen years of age. He will not quarrel with me, I hope, for saying that he was not one of those who arrive by dint of plodding application. The facility which marks him now was his almost from the first: feats which only became possible to his fellow-students after months of labour he mastered, those fellow-students tell me, in weeks. However, I do not mean to trace him through all the stages of his apprenticeship. It must suffice to say that, if he did not kill himself with overwork, he at least assimilated all that was best in the teaching of his master, while, at the same time, he became an exquisite draughtsman, in a vital and personal way rare in any school, and rarest of all in ours. I wish it had been possible to reproduce in these pages some of the drawings he made as a member of a sketch club in Edinburgh to which Mr. Hugh Cameron, Mr. Peter Graham, Mr. George Hay, now Secretary to the Royal Scottish Academy, Mr. M'Taggart, Mr. John Hutchison the sculptor, and several others belonged. Unhappily Orchardson is the least acquisitive of mortals, and except a few that fell into the hands of friends, which I was not able to run down until too late, and are, moreover, scarcely in a condition to permit of successful photography, they seem to have all disappeared. Judging from the scanty specimens just alluded to, they were marked by

the same fine cadence and vivid truth of line which is never absent from his maturer work.

The rapidity with which Orchardson mastered the essentials of his art is proved by the portrait of his old friend and fellow-student, John Hutchison, here reproduced. This picture was painted before he was twenty, and yet it shows all the confidence in simple effects which as a rule only comes with experience. The head seems a trifle large, but when I have said that I do not know what else to criticize. The colour is delightful. The background is a luminous grey; the coat, etc., grey too, but in that cool, greenish tone which has the force of positive colour in so many of Orchardson's harmonies. It is curious to compare this portrait with that of himself (see page 19), painted more than thirty years later, for the famous series in the Uffizi. The scheme is practically the same in both, the only serious difference being the substitution of a dark background for a light one in the later picture. The handling, of course, has become freer with practice, and the whole conception is carried out with more breadth, fire, and self-confidence. In the earlier portrait the beautifully painted left hand has as evidently posed as the head. In the later, the corresponding member seems to have painted itself. In short, Orchardson is one of those whose growth has been a steady and consistent development from the very first. There is nothing experimental about him. He has known his own mind from the beginning, and, just as before he puts a touch upon a canvas he sees in his mind's eye the finished work, so he may well, when he first emerged from the Trustees' Academy, have already built up a clear mental picture of the whole course of his future activity.

The pictures he painted in Edinburgh are not all, however, so decisive in accent as the portrait of Mr. Hutchison. They are often tentative, as if feeling their way towards bolder schemes of design, chiaroscuro, and colour. The young man's hand was never put out farther than he could draw it back. He was content to work within his powers, to restrict his palette and the latitude of his brush, to realize such conceptions as he could create in his comparatively inexperienced mind, rather than to fling himself into deep water and trust to luck. Even after he ventured south, it was long before he quitted the reserved, almost secretive style of his youth, and gave free play to his native facility.



*J. Hutchison, Esq.*  
*By permission of J. Hutchison, Esq.*



#### IV

ORCHARDSON came to London in 1862. He was followed twelve months later by his friend John Pettie, who was four years his junior. The pair chummed together at No. 37, Fitzroy Square, in the house which was afterwards the home of Madox Brown. For reasons not difficult to explain, the younger man was the first to catch the eye of the public. His conceptions were more ambitious, and his art more *voyant*: he played, in fact, a trumpet to his companion's flageolet. Hence it was that, to the amusement of those they had left behind in Edinburgh, the London critics talked of Orchardson as if he had moulded himself on Pettie. Their fellow-workers at home knew well enough that, after the teaching of Lauder, the moulding influence over the whole clique had been the example and the square mind of the older man. It was to him that his friends turned—and have turned ever since—when they fell into difficulties with their work, to his methods that they looked for hints in perfecting their own. A few years ago one of the most gifted among them said to me, “Ah! Orchardson: he has two heads on his shoulders!”

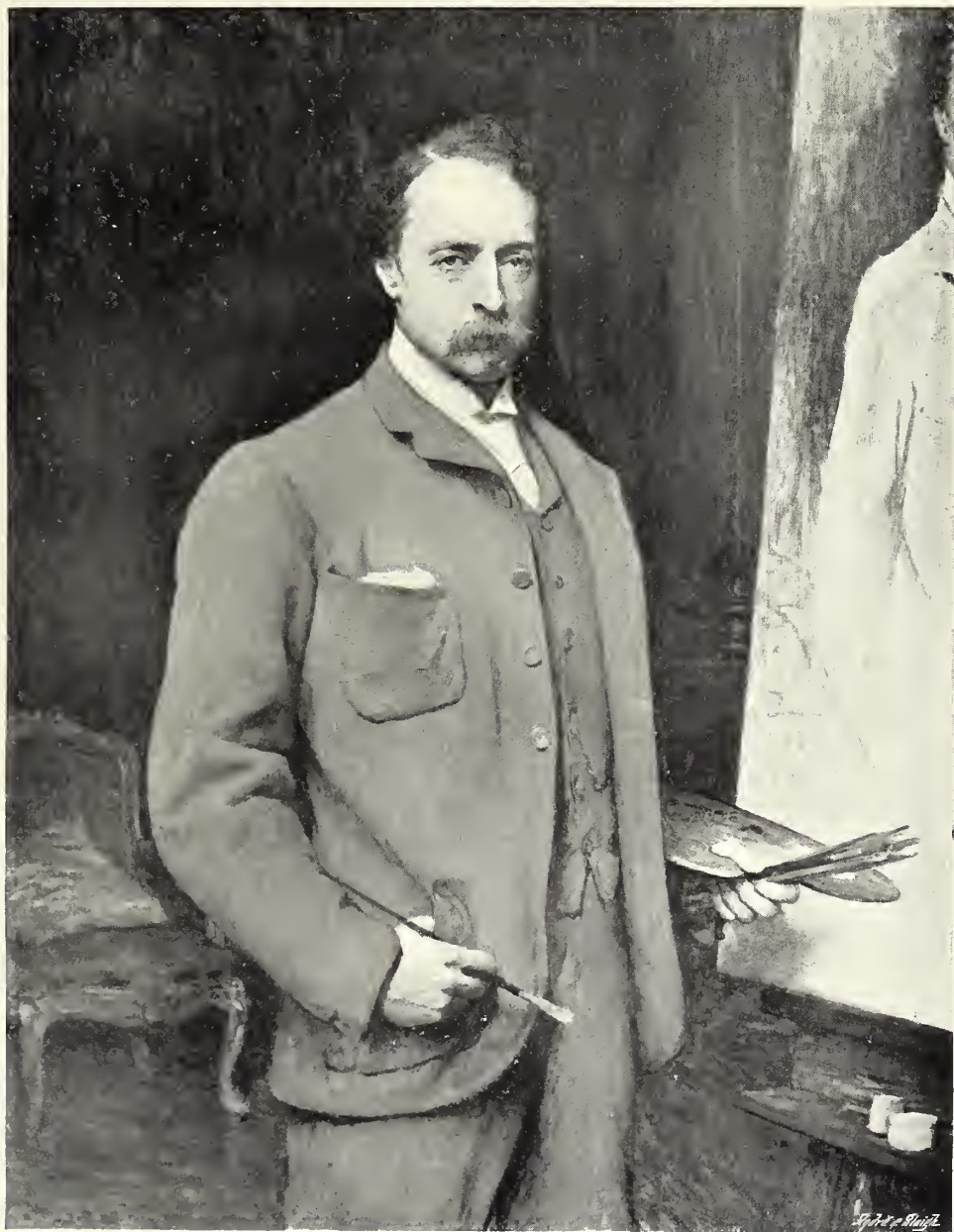
The true explanation of the comparative slowness with which he won recognition here is to be found in that nice balance of his own ambition to which I have already referred. He never attempted to paint for the gallery; he never hankered after any effects but such as were entirely within the compass of his equipment at the moment. For years after he came to London he restricted himself to the most reticent colour harmonies, to the simplest arrangement of figures, to the most self-contained and readily comprehensible themes. A girl at a stile waiting for her lover; a Venetian greengrocer paddling his boat-load of vegetables along some shadowy canal; a wild Cavalier presenting a challenge on

his sword's point to a two-minded Roundhead ; a girl nerved by her own beauty, threading the clashing swords of a crowd of adoring males—it was upon themes like these that he lavished his power to rival the soft, sleeping tints on the back of an old Arras. In the blatancy of Burlington House they were not calculated to force attention, and so it was not until his familiar friend had been an A.R.A. for eighteen months that he won the right to sport the same initials, and not till Pettie had been four years an Academician that he became one too.

It must, however, in fairness be confessed that there was another factor in retarding Orchardson's promotion. He had then, as he has still, an *insouciant* way of taking his art which gave him the air almost of an amateur among the painfully-in-earnest young men who were racing him for academic honours. People might have been forgiven, when they saw the alacrity with which he would throw down his palette if any one whispered "tennis," for supposing that he would not break his heart if the outward signs of success in his profession were a little delayed. This easy way of taking life clings to him still. Even now that he at least shares the headship of the English school, it is difficult to say whether his favourite weapon is a paint-brush or a split cane fishing-rod. I fancy that any one who wishes to see him at his moment of fullest enjoyment will have to journey down into Wiltshire, and find him on the banks of the Kennet just as the dry fly settles provokingly over the nose of a three-pound trout.

In fact, Orchardson has always set his art against a background of sport. When he first came to England, it was for the saddle that he used to lay down the palette. A feather weight, with the lightest of hands and an excellent judgment, he used for years to follow the fortunes of the Chiddingfold Hounds, in Surrey, a yeoman pack, hunted by four brothers called Sadler.

On his marriage he gave up hunting, and took to a sport to which he had been casually introduced years before at Brighton. Pettie and he strolled one day into the tennis-court behind the Bedford Hotel, took up a pair of rackets, and set themselves to solve the mysteries of the king of games. The fancy here conceived was nourished in St. John's Wood, when Orchardson became a member of the M.C.C., and frequented the tennis-court with some regularity. It was not until 1877, however,



*Portrait of the Painter, by Himself.  
From the picture in the Uffizi Gallery.*





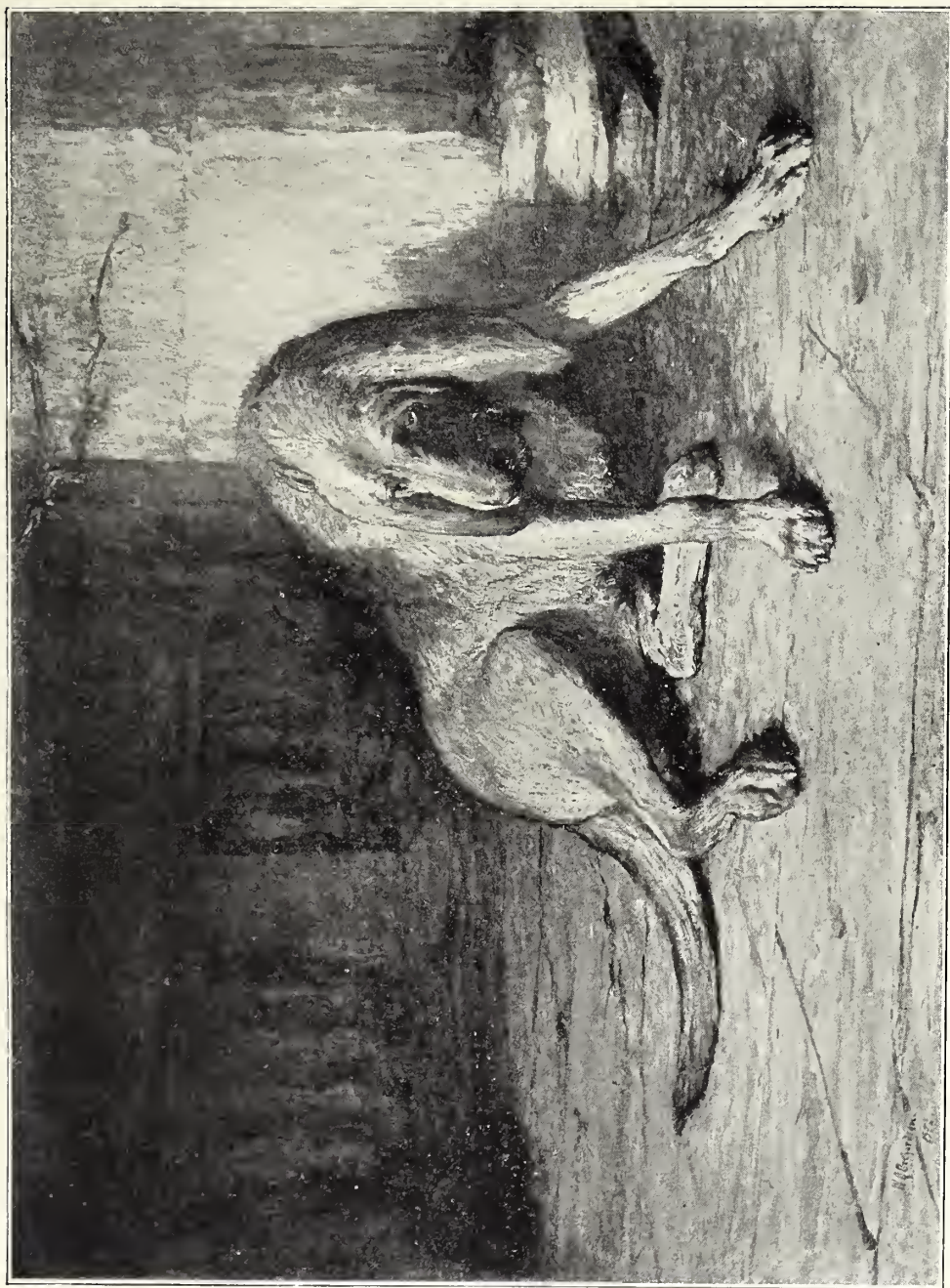
that he became a devotee to the game. In that year he finished building the house at Westgate in which he spent much of his time until two or three years ago. In the garden he built an open tennis-court, the first, I believe, which had been constructed since the sixteenth century, when most of the French courts, at least, were roofless. Here, thanks to the dry climate of the "east neuk" of Kent, he lost and won chases against nearly all the heroes of the game for a matter of fifteen years, with few disappointments from the weather. I have spent whole summer days in this court, and a more delicious setting for a delightful game it would be hard to conceive. Overhead a sky like Italy, within the walls an atmosphere like dry champagne, behind the gallery nets roses hanging in bunches from the pillars on which the service wall was carried, and nothing to awaken care except an occasional crash of broken glass, when some wild return leapt the high wire guards and broke a neighbour's window! In the same garden he built a combined studio and billiard-room, so that work could be sandwiched between two kinds of play. In fact, the whole installation epitomized the man who contrives, as few others have contrived, to refute the implication in Raphael's *Vision of a Knight*. The man who is "Integer vitæ, scelerisque purus" is not called upon to choose between Duty and Pleasure. For him these are different names for one thing.

To finish with Orchardson's diversions, if, after this, I may still call them so. As the years pass, and violence becomes too sharp a sauce to exercise, the judicious man looks out for some form of relaxation which shall make a less demand upon the muscles. To-day he has the choice of two—the contemplative man's recreation, and the royal and ancient game of golf. Orchardson began with the former. With Pettie and some other friends he took a fishing on the Kennet, near Marlborough, and there for the last few years he has been proving the merits of the dry fly, and landing trout to which the little three-to-the-pounders of his native streams were but as *hors-d'œuvre* to a feast.

May we call talk a diversion? Is it not rather the purest medium of intellectual expression? Does not all that a man has become, all that he can ever hope to be, betray itself in his conversation? Is not spoken language, the instrument to which he has been trained, hour by hour and minute by minute, ever since his eyes first opened on the world,

the completest test of the intellectual man? Orchardson's talk is of the pregnant kind. Every remark he makes straightens out what has gone before, and prepares it for the next contribution to the common structure. And his "colloguer" goes home convinced that he had never met a more unerring mind.

The *ménage* in Fitzroy Square was broken up in 1865, when Pettie entered into the holy estate of matrimony. Orchardson then moved to Bedford Gardens, Campden Hill, and from there to the neighbouring Phillimore Gardens. In 1873 he followed Pettie's example, and married Miss Ellen Moxon, whose features appear in two of our illustrations—her own portrait, on page 41, and the *Master Baby* (Plate III.). He afterwards lived at various addresses in the Brompton Road, Lansdowne Road, Spencer Street, Westminster, and, lastly, in Portland Place, where the erection of a palatial studio has probably fixed him for the rest of his days.



*A Bloodhound.*  
*By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*



IN 1870 the power of attraction wielded by Venice over every cultivated mind drew Orchardson to Italy. He left London late in April, and, better advised than most of those who make the same journey, arrived in the City of the Lagoons early in May. Venice from the beginning of May until well on into June is the most delicious thing in the world. The heat is just what it should be. The sky is seldom cloudless, but never cloudy. The air has none of the *tiédeur* of July, and the smells have not yet begun to seriously invade the Grand Canal, although the smaller waterways, the *anastomoses* of the great main artery, will make even a gondolier mutter "Cattivo!" And the atmosphere: even that of Egypt falls short of its vivid clearness. Perhaps this is due to the never-absent touch of moisture in the air, for the only days to equal in brilliancy those of the early Venetian summer I have ever seen have been one or two in the Western Highlands of Scotland, very rare July days, when the sun blazed through an atmosphere washed clean by showers, and made the mountains and the scintillating surface of the sea gleam as if a rain of jewels had fallen on the earth. Unfortunately, things are not very paintable under such conditions. The scale of tones at the painter's command is far too short, his pigments far too dull, to render, or even to suggest, the action of the sunlight through an absolutely transparent medium. Now and then it has been tried. Rochegrosse attacked the problem in front in last year's Salon with his *Chevalier aux Fleurs*; Besnard attempted to turn its flank in the strange and much-disputed picture of horses which was at the Salon du Champs de Mars. But, on the whole, the results are not worth the sacrifices which have to be made. Such pictures must, in their very nature, be rather

*tours de force* than art. And you may force their tones as much as you please, they will never make the weakest eyes blink. It was partly, no doubt, owing to its irresistible invitation to a delicious *far niente*



*Study from Miss Orchardson.  
By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*

that Orchardson did little work in Venice, but the conviction that the Venetian summer was better to look at than to paint must also have had its share in his idleness. His home was on the Grand Canal.

He took rooms in the Casa Benitzki, and of course he chartered a gondolier. This man, Antonio, was one of those invaluable servants you may find once or twice in a lifetime among the Latin races, but never, in ten lives, among the Teutons. Everything conceivable that an Englishman in Venice could require, Antonio sought and found. He was, too, a bit of a Caleb Balderstone. The lamented Freddy Walker joined Orchardson in Venice, and the latter gives a droll account of his arrival. He came by sea. Antonio was ordered to engage a second gondolier, so that the visitor might be brought with due safety and expedition from the steamer's stopping-place at Malamocco. Antonio improved on these instructions, and arrived before the Casa Benitzki with a double gondola, and three men besides himself. As soon as the boat was under the steamer's side, Walker scrambled down the companion, landed in the gondolier's brawny arms, and, twisting about to grasp his friend's hand, spluttered out without a word of preface: "Caught a four-pound trout! caught a four-pound trout!" He was as delighted as a child over the whole performance, and the climax came when, after a record-breaking transit, the four men brought their gondola up sharp at the steps, like a racehorse pulled on to his haunches.

Antonio was a hero, as well as a first-rate factotum. During his service with Orchardson he took a wife, and the story of his marriage is one of rare devotion. The girl to whom he was *fiancé* caught small-pox in its worst form. After a long battle with the disease she was left almost for dead. Her strength had been drained to the last drop, and her Italian doctor took refuge in an old-fashioned idea, which may be superstition or may be wisdom. He declared that her only chance of life lay in some healthy and vigorous person giving part of that vigour to her. Who would run such a risk? The girl's relations were proud, though poor enough, and would not listen to Antonio when he offered, or rather demanded as a right, to make the trial himself. He persisted, however. He forced his way to the girl's bedside, took her in his arms where she lay, and never relaxed his hold for a day and a night, until the feeble spark of life was nourished back to the beginnings of flame. The girl survived, frightfully disfigured, but Antonio married her, and presented her, his face beaming with pride and delight, to his English employer.

Another little sketch, and I have done with Antonio. He could not read a line of any language, but he spoke English fluently, having sailed in English ships. Orchardson knew no Italian, but, thanks to his Scottish schooling in Latin, he could read it intelligibly. So, in the late summer of 1870, when the newspapers grew so exciting that the *Times* could not be waited for, the painter used to read the Venetian papers aloud to the gondolier, who, dubiously, never quite convinced that to a signor who could actually read Italian its sounds conveyed no meaning, would translate the accounts of the defeat at Wörth, of the fights before Metz, and of the advance of Fate on Paris.

Towards the end of August, Antonio's translations became too stimulating. Orchardson determined to pack up his traps and try to see something of the war. Leaving Italy by way of the Brenner, he travelled through Munich, passed Strasburg within distant sight of the siege, and found himself entangled in the great double stream of war-traffic, the German reinforcements crowding forward, and the poor French prisoners from Sedan—"train-loads without a human expression among them"—slowly crawling to their captivity among the scenes of their fathers' triumphs. It soon, of course, became quite impossible to get through, and our painter had to turn southwards, and by slow roundabout stages make his way to Dieppe and London.

Since 1870 Orchardson has only left his native country for short runs abroad, and Mons. Chesneau's supposition that he has elaborately studied French and German painting has no sort of foundation.



## VI

ORCHARDSON'S career may be fairly divided into two parts, the line being drawn after the summer of 1880. Before that date his work had been reticent, self-contained, and as it were painted for himself. Only those who looked with seeing eyes understood its quality. It had comprised a few of his very finest things—the *Queen of the Swords*, the *Challenge*, the *Conditional Neutrality*, and the *Portrait of Mr. Moxon*, for instance. But it had embodied little of that broad, dramatic effectiveness which has been a feature since 1880. Considerations of space make it impossible to follow his footsteps, as marked by pictures, one by one, while it would require a genius to make such a detailed exhibition agreeable, not to say profitable. I propose, therefore, to glance at a few of his more characteristic productions, taken more in the order suggested by a certain sequence of ideas than in any stricter method of classification.

The *Queen of the Swords* was at the Academy in 1877, and had a great success twelve months later at the Universal Exhibition in Paris. The subject is taken from *The Pirate*, from the scene where Minna Troil justifies the *sobriquet* with which Halcro had dubbed her. Here is Scott's creation: "The first movement was graceful and majestic, the youths holding their swords erect, and without much gesture; but the tune, and the corresponding motions of the dancers, became gradually more and more rapid—they clashed their swords together, in measured time, with a spirit which gave the exercise a dangerous appearance in the eye of the spectator, though the firmness, justice, and accuracy with which the dancers kept time with the stroke of their weapons did, in truth, insure its safety. The most singular part of the exhibition was

the courage exhibited by the female performers, who now, surrounded by the swordsmen, seemed like the Sabine maidens in the hands of their Roman lovers ; now, moving under the arch of steel which the young men had formed, by crossing their weapons over the heads of their fair partners, resembled the band of Amazons when they first joined in the Pyrrhic dance with the followers of Theseus. But by far the most striking and appropriate figure was that of Minna Troil, whom Halcro had long since entitled the Queen of Swords, and who, indeed, moved amidst the swordsmen with an air which seemed to hold all the drawn blades as the proper accompaniments of her person and the implements of her pleasure ; and when the mazes of the dance became more intricate, when the close and continuous clash of the weapons made some of her companions shrink and show signs of fear, her cheek, her lip, and her eye seemed rather to announce that, at the moment when the weapons flashed fastest and rang sharpest round her, she was most completely self-possessed, and in her own element."

The painter has taken from the scene exactly what it had to spare for a new medium of expression. The words of Scott are followed closely enough ; the picture might even, with a touch of malice, be called an illustration ; and yet it can stand alone. We do not require even the title to put us *au fait* with what is taking place. The canvas explains itself even to the dullest, and even the dullest can see why it was painted at all. It was not painted to be read with the novel. It was painted because the double line of swordsmen, with the sinuous stream of women stepping in time beneath the arch of steel, gave an opportunity for the coherent play of line ; it was painted because the stately measure of the dance gave just the right sense of movement, and the costumes of 1750 the right opportunity for colour ; it was painted because the fiddlers and the older, soberer section of the company would furnish excellently the empty spaces of the canvas. In fact, the reading of Scott's page suggested to the painter's mind an image in which all pictorial elements would work together for unity. To those who look upon any "subject" whatever as fatal to a work of art this will seem a poor excuse. Others less fanatical will acknowledge that a subject, like the stubbornnesses of paint itself, is at worst an obstacle to be overcome, a difficulty the facing of which may be justified by the way in which it is negotiated. The *Queen*



Walter G. Wells, D. Sc.

*Hard Hit.*  
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W. G. Wells, D. Sc.



*of the Swords* was so good a subject that it required nothing but the painter's modulating eye to turn it into a picture. With the next thing I have to speak about it was otherwise, and here I find an opportunity of showing how a good literary theme can be turned into a good pictorial one by taking a few judicious liberties.

Every one is familiar with the delightful scene in *Woodstock* where



*Escaped.*

*By permission of Humphrey Roberts, Esq., owner of the copyright.*

Roger Wildrake carries Mark Everard's *cartel* to the supposed Louis Kerneguy.

“‘Let us get to business, sir, if you please,’ said the King. ‘You have a message for me, you say?’

“‘True, sir,’ replied Wildrake; ‘I am the friend of Colonel Markham Everard, sir, a tall man, and a worthy person in the field, although

I could wish him a better cause. A message I have to you, it is certain, in a slight note, which I take the liberty of presenting with the usual formalities.' So saying, he drew his sword, put the billet he mentioned upon the point, and, making a profound bow, presented it to Charles.

"The disguised monarch accepted it," &c.

Now that is the whole scene. The only characters on the stage are Charles and the Cavalier. Paint it as it stands, and you will have to quote a whole page of Scott before you can make it comprehensible to the poor wretch who finds himself before it with no preparation but his catalogue. And even then you will not move his interest. To do that you require to know all that has passed in the story. You require to have the jealousy of Everard, the fears of Alice Lee, the unconsciousness of Wildrake, and the consciousness of Charles, all vividly present in your mind. In fact, the force of the situation depends upon a multitude of things which paint—which no simultaneous form of art—can give. In the novel the scene is splendid, and most fit. In a picture it would be nothing. And yet it has wrapped up in it some first-rate pictorial materials, in the contrasted figures and characters of the two men, in the forward bend of the one and the recoil of the other, in the long horizontal line of the rapier and the menacing touch of white on its point. The problem Orchardson had to solve was how to clothe all this in accessories which would explain, and even heighten, its significance. *Woodstock* itself suggested a solution. Within the same boards as Louis Kerneguy lives Trusty Tomkins, the psalm-singing Roundhead, whose creed may well have allowed a little corner for the duello, no less than for the charms of Phœbe Mayflower. Put him in the place of the hiding king, set a dissuader in the person of a Puritan divine at his elbow, throw a combination of scruple and a taste for *sa, sa* into his physiognomy, and you have at once a complete and most paintable drama.

\* \* \* \*

By this time the reader is probably feeling for his pencil, to scribble a sarcastic note on the margin of this page. And indeed the mistake into which I have fallen is absurd enough. It has at last dawned upon me, however, that it was not with *Woodstock*, as I find it in the notes



*Charles Mexon, Esquire.*  
*By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*





to one of my talks with Orchardson, that *The Challenge* has to do, but with *Pevevil of the Peak*. There, of course, the scene will be found almost exactly as we see it in the picture. The challenger is Sir Jasper Cranbourne, the challenged Major Bridgenorth, and the dissuasive divine Master Solsgrace. I am tempted, however, to leave the paragraph as I wrote it, because, although it does not happen to apply to the particular case as well as might be wished, it does explain the kind of process which most incidents taken from books have to undergo before they become self-contained works of art.

\*            \*            \*            \*

I have said already that the *Queen of the Swords* was at the Paris exhibition of 1878. Together with other things from the same studio it had a very great success both with painters and critics on the south side of the Channel. Its happy design, its gallantry, and its debonnaire treatment generally appealed to the French mind, and seduced it for the moment from its preoccupation with the more actual moods of art. Nevertheless, to eyes accustomed to the cool, gray tones, the broad handling, and the solid *pâte* of French pictures, the more positive tones, the more detailed if yet dexterous brushing, and the comparatively thin, transparent impasto of Orchardson, was not altogether agreeable—and yet they might have found a precedent for it all in some of their own great men, in more than one of those painters of *fêtes galantes* who were the only glory of French painting in the eighteenth century. To this question, however, we must return when the moment comes for trying to fix Orchardson's place in the general march of art.

The two portraits which I have chosen as characteristic examples of his work in the first half of his career were painted in 1875 and 1876, *Mr. Moxon* belonging to the former year, and *Conditional Neutrality* to the latter. The first is a straightforward portrait, depending on no adventitious aid for its effect. The pose is momentary, full of power, at rest, but about to pass into action in pursuit of thought. The head is finely and most searchingly modelled, the left hand perfect in expression, the background thoroughly sympathetic and complementary. In short, it is a simple, sedate, and most thorough piece of work. The second is more deliberately picturesque. The portrait of a boy of five or so, it presents us with a delightful scheme of colour, picked up by the happy introduction

of some of those nursery properties which have done so much to smooth the paths of all who have had to paint children. In a way it reminds us of Sir Joshua's *Master Crewe*, which by the time these lines are in print will be hanging on the walls of Burlington House. The pugnacity of the young human male is the keynote of both. Orchardson, like Reynolds, saw in proneness to resist the most characteristic feature of man at the age of five, and, also like Reynolds, he thought his truculence would be none the worse for being set off with the bravery of silk and velvet. Painters generally do best when they are painting for themselves. The hero of *Conditional Neutrality* is the painter's own first-born son, now a most promising student at the Royal Academy; and this explains, perhaps, a certain audacity in the colour scheme, a certain *bravura* in the handling, a certain pervading vivacity of selection, which are scarcely to be found in the same degree in other things belonging to this period. It is usual to suppose that some of the mellow harmony of Venetian pictures is the gift of time and varnish. One of the greatest of English painters has consistently worked in obedience to that belief, and not a few smaller men have followed his example. Whether it be well founded or not it is difficult to say. One fact may be pointed to which throws some doubt on the theory—namely, that the shadows in good Venetian pictures are as warm and luminous as the lights. A brilliant passage, a piece of drapery, for instance, painted chiefly with vermilion, will undoubtedly become richer and more luminous when it glows through a coat of mellow varnish, because the tone of the latter is lower than its own. But suppose this same varnish overlying a very dark but still luminous shadow. Being higher in tone than the shadow, it will diminish its transparency. In short, it will act as a scumble, whereas in the first instance it acted as a glaze. Now any first-rate example of the greater Venetians is equally transparent all over, except in those very high lights which have been painted with extreme solidity. And this makes it doubtful whether time and accident have had so much to do with their superb tone as is often believed. However that may be, a picture painted almost entirely in high tones will certainly benefit by time, supposing it to have no seeds of premature decay in its own constitution. *Conditional Neutrality* is such a picture, and I suspect that a century hence it will be looked upon as one of the treasures of the English school.



*Conditional Neutrality.*

*By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R. A.*



During the earlier of the two periods into which I have ventured to divide his career, Orchardson's whole work was marked by judgment in conception and sobriety in execution. The subjects chosen, whether suggested by writers or spun out of his own inner consciousness, are always so arranged as at once to tell their own story, and yet to declare that the motive which led to their being painted at all was truly and essentially pictorial. In this respect it would not be fantastic to attempt a comparison between him and Hogarth, most of whose fame depends—not so much on those gifts of satire and detached common sense to which critics have chiefly directed our attention, but—on the extraordinary skill with which he combines dramatic with æsthetic qualities, and makes his scenes explain themselves, down to the minutest details, through matters required by pictorial balance and unity. Hogarth, in short, was a master of composition. His *Marriage à la mode* reads like *Tom Jones*. We pass from scene to scene, receiving from each exactly what it has to give, missing nothing, inventing nothing, and accumulating as we go a conviction of the painter's infallibility in selecting and marshalling materials, of his power to breathe the keenest vitality into his men and women. It would be going too far to transfer all this to Orchardson. He has never been pricked by the didactic spur. He feels no desire to reprove the time, or to strip poor human nature and lead it up naked to the mirror. To him the second of Hogarth's incentives is the first, and, when the events of life have supplied him with a hook on which fine colour, sympathetic design, and a coherent arabesque may be hung, he is content.

The Paris exhibition of 1878 marks with sufficient accuracy the close of this first period; and here I should like to quote what one of the more intelligent of the French critics was then impelled to write of our painter:—

“Le maître en ce domaine de l'expression, celui qui domine tout le groupe des physionomistes par la mesure, par le jeu des nuances et aussi par l'habileté de la main, c'est Mons. W. Q. Orchardson. Ses tableaux cependant—est-ce un éloge?—sont peu ou même point du tout anglais. Ils figureraient indifféremment dans les galeries françaises, belges, ou dans l'école de Düsseldorf, sans que personne en fut étonné. Est-ce donc que le talent n'a point de nationalité! Ou plutôt, ce que

j'incline à croire, que Mons. Orchardson a soigneusement étudié, de ce côté de la Manche, les écoles contemporaines, et qu'il s'est composé ainsi, en y ajoutant sa propre personnalité, un talent très personnel, plus voisin des principes d'art du continent cependant que de ceux de ses compatriotes.

“En tout cas, le résultat est des plus séduisants, et les tableaux de Mons. Orchardson, le *Défi* [“The Challenge”] et *Christopher Sly*, ont obtenu chez nous un succès aussi rapide que légitime.

“*Le Défi* est charmant de grâce spirituelle ; je ne sais malheureusement à quel drame le motif est emprunté.

“Une sorte de Scapin ironique, tout vêtu de satin jaune serin, chapeau bas, le haut du corps incliné, présente à la pointe de son épée la lettre de défi à une sorte de cavalier philosophe que cette provocation intempestive trouble dans son travail. Un vieillard enveloppé d'une lévite, son compagnon d'études, s'est levé avec empressement ; il retient le bras du cavalier comme pour le dissuader d'accepter et de prendre au sérieux ce défi insolite et insolent.

“Il est inutile de rappeler au lecteur que Christopher Sly est le héros de cette bouffonnerie qui sert de prologue à la *Mégère domptée* de Shakespeare.

“Mons. Orchardson a disposé tous ces groupes, animé toutes ces physionomies avec une entente profonde de la scène. L'interprétation de cette amusante parade était pleinement dans son talent souple et enjoué. Les attitudes sont justes, d'un dessin facile et correct ; l'expression des têtes est fine et spirituelle, comique sans charge, grotesque sans grossièreté. En outre, malgré certaines maigreurs de touche et bien que l'exécution soit un peu mince, un peu épinglée, l'ensemble est cependant d'une coloration ravissante, harmonieuse comme l'envers d'une vieille tapisserie.

“Depuis, bien d'autres tableaux d'un goût exquis, la *Reine des Epées* [*Queen of the Swords*], *l'Antichambre*, le *Décavé* [*Hard Hit*] ont placé Mons. William Quiller Orchardson au premier rang des petits maîtres du genre.”

To the English reader Mons. Chesneau's assertions that Orchardson's pictures are “little if at all English” and “might figure without causing remark in the school of Düsseldorf” will seem both strange and bold,



*Mrs. Orchardson.*  
*By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*





and we shall see presently that his conjectural explanation has no foundation at all. But the remainder of his estimate strikes me as



*On the North Foreland.  
From the picture in the Diploma Gallery, Burlington House.*

sound, although, no doubt, one or two of the phrases mean little more than that Orchardson does not paint quite as a Frenchman would. An

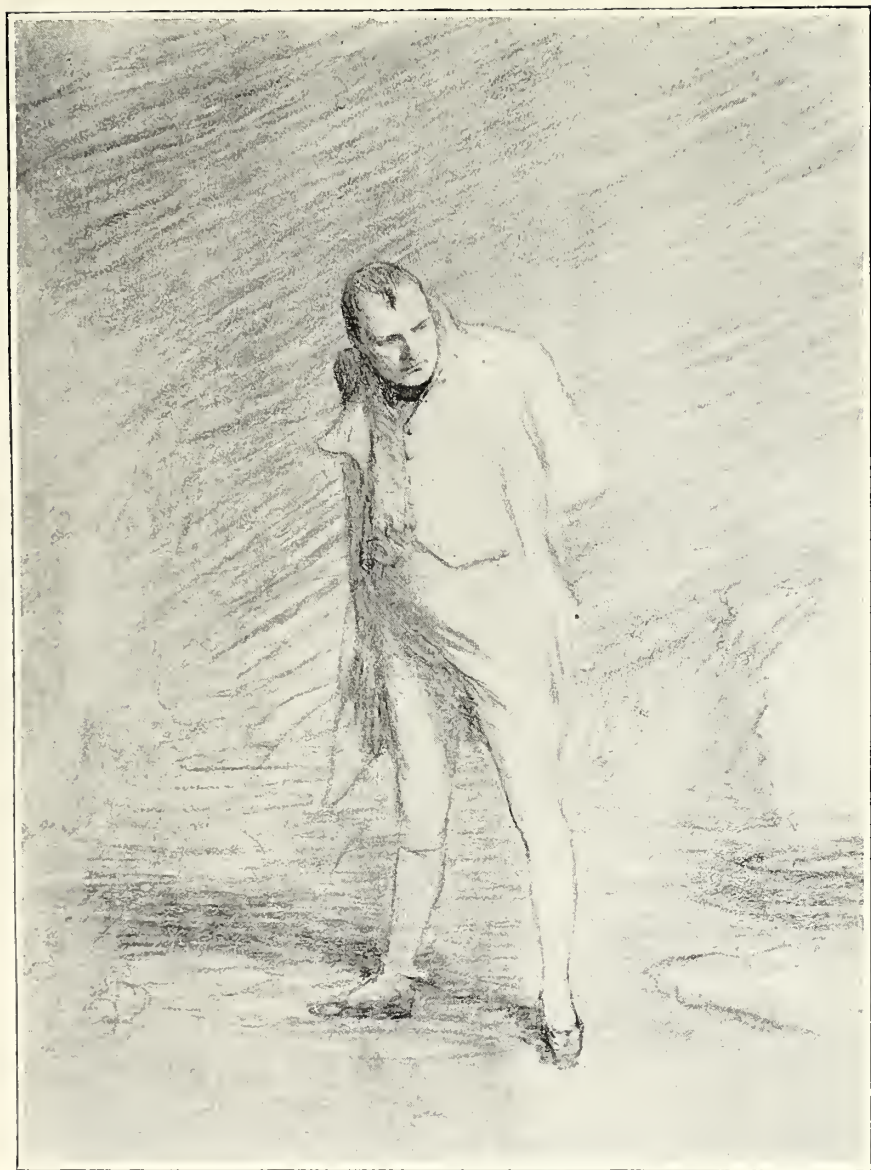
interesting question is suggested by his dictum that the painter's colour is "delightful, and as harmonious as the back of an old tapestry." Other French writers were not so kind—" *âcre* " and " *crue* " were the best epithets they could find for the English master's colour, and in view of the line taken by English painting since 1878 it is likely enough that their strictures would find many sympathizers on this side of the Channel. But colour is a large subject, and what I have to say about it in connection with Orchardson must be postponed to a later page. Here it will be enough to confess my agreement with Mons. Chesneau's comparison of Orchardson's colour schemes, before 1880, with the delicious harmonies in gray which meet you when you pull out an old arras from the wall, and examine the side which time has modulated without the help of dirt.

## VII

ORCHARDSON first blazed out into popularity in 1881. To the exhibition of that year he sent the large picture *On Board the "Belle-rophon,"* which was bought by the Council of the Royal Academy in their capacity as Chantrey's Trustees. He had always been a believer in Napoleon. The modern conception of the first French Emperor—the idea which has found its strongest expression, perhaps, in the volumes of Mdme. de Rémusat and the history left incomplete by Lanfrey—had never made a home in his mind, and those who talked to him on the subject ten years ago stumbled on a forecast of the notions which are now, thanks to Marbot, Sardou, Masson, and a number of other incongruous people, again beginning to group themselves round the figure of the *Petit Caporal*. Every one, I suppose, has a right to his own conception of such an apparition as Napoleon. His orbit was so far above the plane in which most of us move that it is difficult to get him into any rational perspective. We may guess at his motives by analyzing our own, but a single consideration is enough to make us doubt the result. The vast majority of mankind is unable to see conduct otherwise than in the light of inherited and instilled notions. It is unable to comprehend an individual in whom the intellectual powers are so audacious, independent, and self-reliant, that, by their own action, they can wipe out any inherited prejudice whatever. It is absurd to think of Napoleon as of a man believing in the usual morality, and deliberately outraging it for his own purposes; absurd to paint him, as one writer has done, disturbed by no qualms over the fate of the *Grande Armée*, but blenching at the name of the Duc d'Enghien. He was one of those to whom the distinction the world

chose to make between devastating a neighbour's country and shooting an inconvenient prince in the ditch of Vincennes seemed purely fantastic; still more fantastic would he think it to have such incidents turned into footrules to measure his own stature. He belonged to a system outside all this. He looked upon himself as a sort of kosmic force, and, like a kosmic force, he put the individual out of sight in taking measures for the triumph of an idea. The only question, perhaps, worth an answer in this connection is the very large one, Was his final impulse selfish or ideal? Did he devastate the Continent to make his own name blaze in history, or because he had the ambition to do for the world at large what he had done for the laws of France and for the constitution of the Comédie Française? Between these two explanations each man will choose according to his own predilection: Orchardson chose the latter. His Napoleon on the deck of an English ship of the line is an imprisoned force. It is not only a great soldier, not only an absolute ruler, not only a disappointed man, we see there. It is an embodiment of will, of order, of control, arrested for the moment by a vexatious accident. Grant that small, square, deep-thinking, firmly planted personality a respite from physical decay, and at the first opportunity it will be back at the work of bringing order out of destruction, or, if you like, clearing the site for a new civilization.

You may say that all this is inconsistent with Napoleon's picture of himself, especially with that part of it in which we see him anxious about the verdict of posterity. You may say, too, that my reading of the painter's intention in the *Bellerophon* picture is contradicted by the Napoleon he himself painted twelve years later. This second picture is the *St. Helena*—1816, which was at the Academy in 1893. Here the captive is by no means an heroic figure; but he has been a captive for a year. For a year he has been controlled by his inferiors. For a year his vivid, all embracing, essentially constructive imagination has hurtled against those of men to whom life is routine. For a year he has been a caged eagle, conscious of his wings and of his ability to face the sun, and yet chained down by wingless, blinking mortals, to whom even his own glory had been a thing too dazzling to look at and comprehend. A painter might well choose such a change to give point to his drama, and yet I must confess that, to me, Orchardson seems to have slightly over-



*Study for the figure of Napoleon at St. Helena.  
By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*

done the contrast. In his second *Napoleon* we may trace a combination of impatience with solicitude, of irritability with a desire to put his best foot foremost, which do not grow inevitably out of the checked but irresistible personality of twelve months before. To me he even seems to have painted his idol concocting a lie, and the secretary knowing he is doing it. On this I do not animadvert from a moral but from an artistic point of view. It seems an error in proportion. The painter, of course, justifies himself, or rather, to be more exact, the presumptuous critic finds an excuse for what the painter has done, in the plea of physical decay, in the consideration that "General Bonaparte" had, in 1816, already begun to understand that his time was short, and that, if he would leave such a portrait of himself as he would like the world to accept, he must make haste and get it done. I may put it another way. A novelist writes a story. Through the main development of his tale he takes full thought for the logical sequence of his events, for the natural growth of his characters, for the due presentation of the catastrophe. So far his bow is at full stretch. His style is at the level of his theme. But afterwards he cannot resist the temptation of a little more. In pity, perhaps, for the curiosity of his readers, he lifts the curtain he has just rung down, and, in a few hurried, formless sentences, he lets you see the peace of the widow, the philoprogenitive delights of the married lovers, or, may be, when the writer is a cynic, the otiose triumph of the villain. It is anticlimax all round. The style sinks with the theme, and too often the postscript is to the novel what the call before the curtain is to the tragedy consummated before it fell. In painting his second *Napoleon* Orchardson yielded perhaps to a similar temptation; the way in which he conducted himself therein shows that he knew well enough that the great French Emperor came to his end on the deck of an English man-of-war.

So far I have said nothing of the pictorial constitution of this *On Board the "Bellerophon."* It is, in fact, unmistakable. The æsthetic and the intellectual elements alike find their focus in the Emperor's figure. All the rest is complement, complement rightly placed and just in proportion, balancing the masses, picking up and resolving the lines, completing the chords of colour. Orchardson is often blamed for his empty spaces. The truth is that his spaces—and, I confess, they are

often ample enough—are seldom empty. They are filled with subtle colour modulations, with the infinite echoes of a harmony which never



*Study for the figure of Madame Récamier.*

dies completely into silence. Almost the only exception I can call to mind occurs in the picture we are now discussing. The mainsail

of the *Bellerophon* seems "blinder," more monotonous and opaque, than it need have been. But that seems a pettifogging fault to find.

Orchardson followed up his success of 1881 by building on a less satisfactory theme a still more perfect work of art. The incident which took his fancy is one of those too numerous events in the life of Voltaire which prevent him, as a personality, from looming over the life of his day at the height his intellect would justify.

In the book already quoted, Chesneau complains that English pictures too often compel a reference to the catalogue before they can be understood. He goes on, with some simplicity, to find a partial excuse for this in the idea that the English public is much more literary in its tastes than the French, and "se tient très généralement au courant de toutes les publications. Les personnages," he adds, "de l'histoire et du roman lui sont donc bien plus familiers qu'ils ne le sont en France." Unhappily for our *Voltaire*, his next sentence is equally true, and here it is: "Les artistes de la Grande-Bretagne n'ont souci que du public de la Grande-Bretagne. Leurs œuvres quittent rarement leur île. Ils sont donc sûrs d'être toujours compris." But the life of Voltaire, epoch-making person though he was, is not currently known in England. Among all the half-million persons who passed through the Academy turnstiles in 1882 it would have been difficult to find a hundred to whom the title of Orchardson's picture would have been explanation enough without the extract in the catalogue. As I hope these pages may be read by some outside that small minority, as *Voltaire* is, perhaps, Orchardson's masterpiece in its class, and as a book is, after all, the better for explaining itself, I may be excused if I repeat the story.

It is about 1720. A large party is dining with the Duc de Sully. Among the guests are the young Arouet de Voltaire and the Chevalier de Rohan-Chabot, notorious for usury and cowardice, vices not often allied with the *grands noms* of France. Voltaire ventures to contradict some assertion of the Chevalier's, who thereupon calls out with a sneer: "Who is this young man who talks so loudly?" "Monsieur le Chevalier," replies Voltaire, "it is one who, if he cannot boast a great name, at least knows how to make the name he does bear honoured." The chevalier goes out in a cool fury, and the company thank his conqueror for driving him off the field. Presently comes one with a message to





K. Lechans, Ph. Sc.

*Master Baby.*

H. Richardson, painter.



Voltaire, seducing him into the street by one of those tales of distress to which his ears were never closed. A great racket ensues, and in a few minutes Voltaire reappears in the dining-room, his clothes disordered, his wig awry, his face inflamed with rage, and calls on his host to avenge an outrage to himself just consummated on the person of his guest, who has been set upon and beaten by the footmen of Rohan. Sully, with many shrugs and phrases of regret, excuses himself from avenging a *roturier* on a ruffian of his own caste.

There is the subject, and we cannot deny that it leaves too much outside the canvas to be an ideal one for pictorial treatment. On the other hand, it lends itself superbly to design and colour. The splendid room, the long table with its load of glass and gold, the figures about it, richly dressed and expressing a variety of emotions in the subtle way proper to a well-bred crowd, the deprecating duke, and the little flaming personality on which the interest is focused, all this gives an opportunity for characterization, for the sort of design which pursues coherence through the most changeful and apparently capricious rhythm, for a decorative scheme of colour, incessantly developing itself out of itself, like a fugue in music. Looking at its organization, nothing could be better than the *Voltaire*. The walls of the room, the stooping servants busied at the sideboard, the long perspective of the table and the men about it, the warm-toned oak parquet, all these form a background against which is set, exactly in the right place, the cool, silvery passage which is the figure of Voltaire. The violence of the little gentleman is undeniably a blot, and, as it was a necessary outcome of the choice of subject, that choice had to be justified. The painter has gone far to afford that justification by the quality of his art.

*Voltaire* was bought by Mr. Schwabe, and forms part of his gift to his native city of Hamburg.

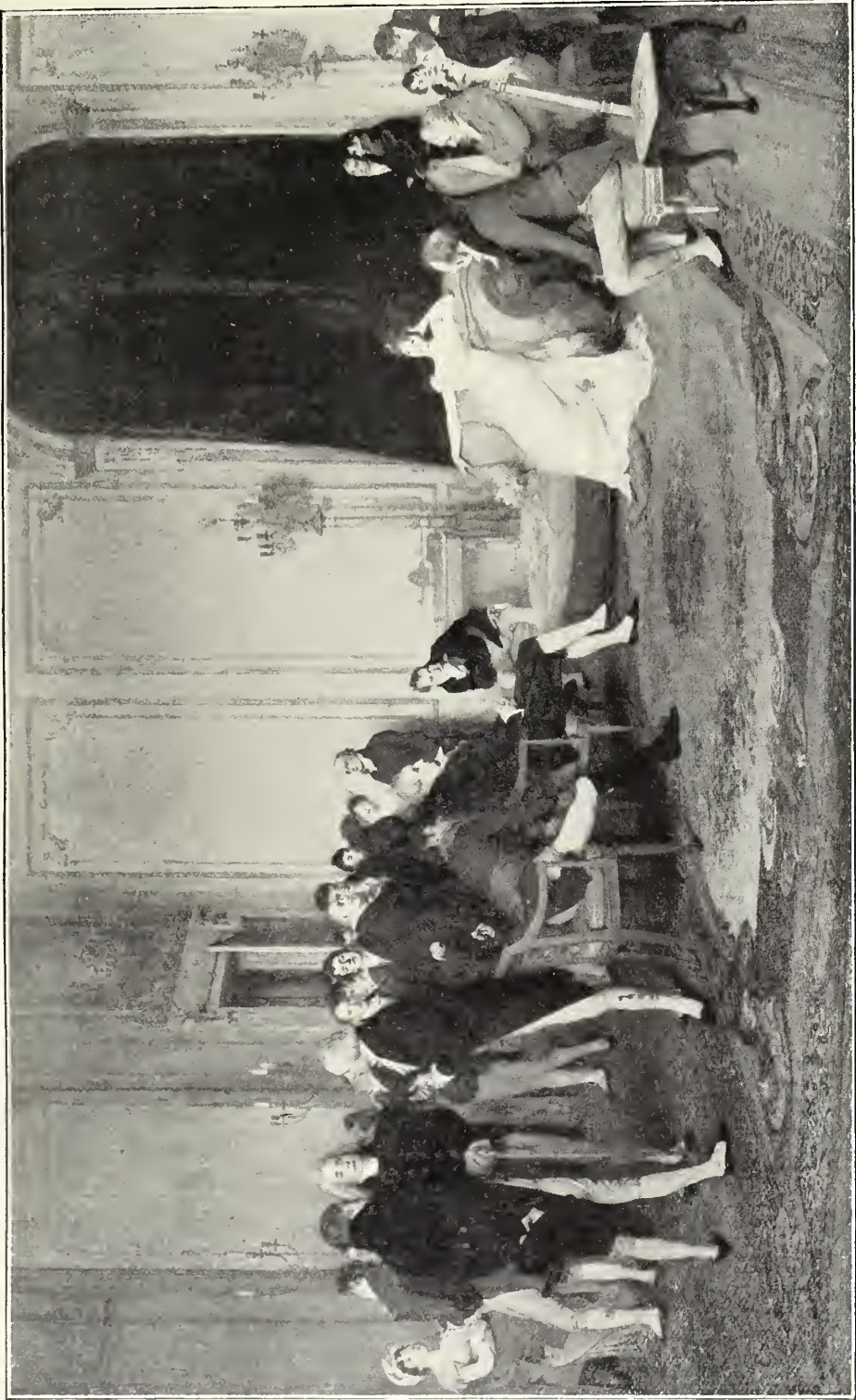
Twice more Orchardson returned to the vein he had struck so successfully in 1882—in *The Salon of Madame Récamier* of 1885, and *The Young Duke* of 1889. I put these in the same class as the *Voltaire*, because the pictorial inducement in each case was the opportunity given by a picturesquely accoutred crowd in a picturesque interior. In such a subject his correct but facile and intensely personal draughtsmanship could enjoy itself to the top of its bent; his light, dexterous, occasionally

meticulous, handling could revel among such gauds as epaulets, sword-hilts, Gouthière mounts, glass and gold and silver plate; while in the passions only half hidden under the conventional masks of society he found satisfaction for his desire at all costs to get character. "Character I must have," I have heard him say; "good character if possible, but, if not good, then give me bad!" There was plenty of both in the salon presided over by Juliette Récamier and Germaine de Staël; and it is not all good character that peeps from beneath the wigs in *The Young Duke*.

Our illustration makes it needless to describe the arrangement of the *Madame Récamier*. Here again the painter hit upon a telling arabesque. The opposition of the deep, dark masses on the left to the higher-toned and smaller groups on the right is managed with consummate tact, while through the whole runs a subtle cadence of line, of which some indication is given to those who have only these pages to refer to in the beautiful sketch we reproduce (page 49).

It would be impertinent, perhaps, to say much on the subject treated in this picture. Every one knows enough about the most famous, if not the most notorious, of the Parisian salons to understand all that Orchardson has here to tell them. It may, nevertheless, be as well to remind the reader that the room in which all these soldiers, diplomats, and men of letters are assembled is not that drawing-room in the Rue de Sèvres to which our thoughts turn most readily at the words *Salon de Madame Récamier*. It is the earlier salon, the throne of which the fair Récamier had to share with the brilliant and by no means fair De Staël. The presence of Lucien, of Bernadotte, of Necker's daughter herself, is enough to show that the time was not yet when half the patronage of the French minister had to pass through the hands of the sexless beauty.

The subject of *The Young Duke* is all upon the canvas. A young grandee has come of age, and celebrates his manhood by feasting his men friends. Pictorially, it is a variation on the *Voltaire*. Putting aside the suggested drama—tragedy or comedy, as it strikes you—of the earlier picture, the materials are the same in both cases, and the new creation is little else than the old looked at from a different point of view. Again we have the shimmer of tapestry and gilded mouldings for a background, a line of periwigged and be-satined men for population, a table with its



*Madame Récamier.*  
*By permission of John Aird, Esq., M.P.*



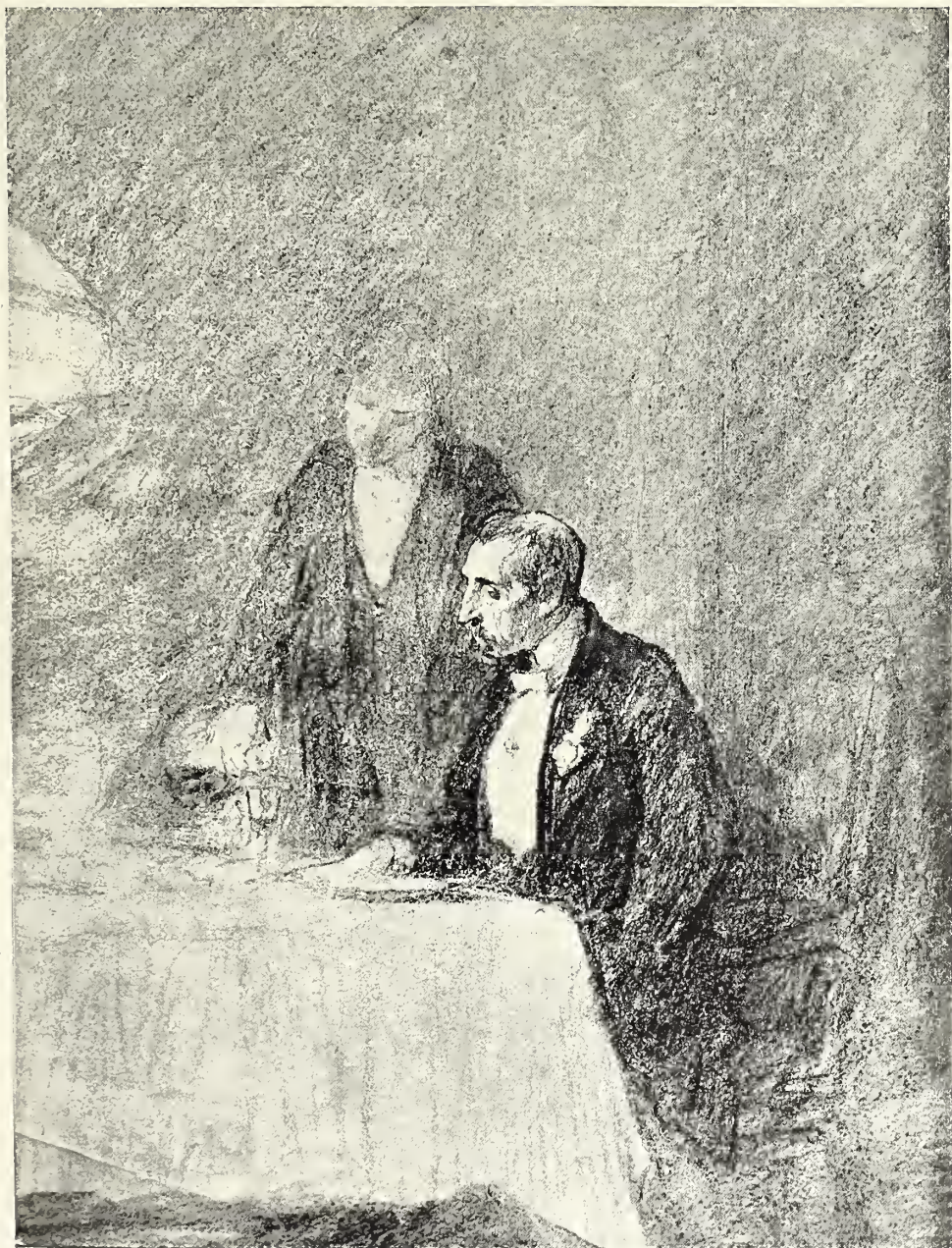
load of furniture and its white cloth for nucleus. The focus and the trend of the masses are different, and the element of opposition—furious Arouet versus impassive Sully and Co.—on which the vitality of the *Voltaire* so greatly depended, is absent altogether, unless, indeed, the freshness of the bowl of roses, with its silent protest against the dissipation going on within its scent, may be taken to supply it.

## VIII

THE most popular of all Orchardson's pictures is probably the *Mariage de Convenance*. The group to which it belongs includes its sequel, *After*, and such domestic scenes as *A Social Eddy*, *Her Mother's Voice*, *An Enigma*, *If Music be the Food of Love*, *play on*, *Hard Hit*, *Her First Dance*, and *Music, when Sweet Voices die, vibrates in the Memory*. All these, with the one exception of *After*, explain themselves, or rather require no explanation. They afford glimpses into the kaleidoscope of society, which you cannot fail to interpret satisfactorily to yourself, and may be classed with those social notes, suggesting much, but putting no dots on the i's, which threaten to supersede the regular short story, just as the latter has half superseded the novel.

The *Mariage de Convenance* speaks a language every man and woman who sees it can understand. The fairly respectable *viveur*, *rangé* at last, and settled down—in his own belief, poor man!—to the quietude of good dinners, good wines, and a handsome wife, with nothing exciting to think about for the rest of his days but the monthly checking of his bank-book, is a not uncommon sight. Every one understands it when they see it, and, happily for the peace of the world, the discontent perceptible on the face of Orchardson's heroine develops into a shattering of all these comfortable arrangements with less frequency than one might expect. This picture shows all Orchardson's usual judgment. The proportions between the figures and the canvas, the placing of the table furniture, the opposition of the two men to the one woman—put the butler beside the lady and you ruin the composition—are all *right*; that is, they work actively together towards the winning of unity, while the pattern of the *chiaroscuro* and the envelope of atmosphere and colour fall smartly into line with the rest. The alertness of the painter's fancy is illustrated by





*Study for Mariage de Convenance.*  
*By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*



a curious device, which breaks the monotony of the background, and helps to keep it in its place. A shaded lamp stands in the middle of



*Reflection.*

*By permission of Messrs. Laurie and Co.*

the table. At the wife's left hand there is a finger-glass. Note the angle at which the lamp-light strikes the water, the angle of incidence ; and

then raise your eyes to the left. There, at a point fixed by the angle of reflection, you will find a disk of light, shimmering through the otherwise unbroken shadow. The trick is slight enough; you might call it trivial; but it has its value in building up not only the truth, but the æsthetic balance, of the scene. *After* is an anticlimax in all but art. In colour, in the transparent depth of its shadows and the brilliancy of its quick sparkling points of light, and in the expression of character, it is even better than the *Mariage*. And the insinuation of a departed glory, the quiet, sympathetic fire—a crackling blaze would have spoilt the whole expression of the scene—the one lamp deepening the gulfs of shadow beyond, and the absolute immobility of the single figure, all these emphasize the disappearance of the one disturbing element in the quietude of the first scene. The man's prospective cares have been whittled down to little more than the temperature of his claret.

The painter was in a more tender mood when he conceived *Her Mother's Voice*. It was one of the first things undertaken after his move into Portland Place, and the room, with its wall of glass and hints of palm and fern, is his own back drawing-room. A girl sings to a young man—her *fiancé*, if you like, but Orchardson had no such meaning—while her widowed father lays down his *Times*, and listens with a face full of memories to an echo of the voice which had won him thirty years before. Few things are more impertinent than the suggesting to a painter of some vital change in his work. Nine times out of ten it amounts to nothing less than asking him to make your individuality, and not his own, the *modulus* for his ideas. Still it is not impossible, with some experience and a vast amount of goodwill, to put oneself behind the artist, to see through his brain and eye, and occasionally to hit upon a notion which may have escaped himself, and yet would reinforce his own conception. It may be pure fatuity, but I fancy that if Orchardson had turned his young lady's back to us, reflecting the effect of her song from her companion's face only, his picture would have profited. One difficulty would have had to be overcome—that of keeping the two groups in effective proportion to each other. This is done at present by pushing the couple away into a distant corner, while the old man is brought down, as it were, to the foot-lights. Disturb this arrangement, and the balance would have to be



*Music, when Sweet Voices die, Vibrates in the Memory.*  
*By permission of Messrs. Hildesheimer and Faulkner.*



reconsidered, but the problem is by no means so insoluble as that of painting a singing mouth which shall be anything but a disfigurement.

Orchardson is a great lover—I won't say admirer, for indeed his fancy is by no means of the kind which blinds its possessor to defects—of the Empire style in furniture as well as other things. His house is filled with it, and more than once the genesis of a picture is to be traced to the purchase of a piano, or a sofa, or a set of chairs. In the series of domestic idyls which we are at present looking at you will find three of these. *An Enigma*, perhaps the finest of the three, would never have existed just as it is but for the introduction into the painter's household of the ample, curly-ended sofa, on which his man and woman, his *jeune femme* and *roué*, are at some cross purpose not closely defined even to their creator himself. Again, *If Music be the Food of Love*, play on is the portraiture of a superb, five-pedalled bronze and *ormoulu*-mounted grand piano, weighted with an incident which, no doubt, it may have seen many a time during its lifetime of ninety years. Another piano, a vertical, harp-shaped engine, recalling with a difference the cupboard-like machines still to be found in the back regions of most old provincial houses, suggested an exquisite little picture most unsympathetically treated by the hangmen of the 1893 Academy. The design of *Music, when Sweet Voices die, Vibrates in the Memory*, no less than its motive, was determined by the shape of the piano. A young girl, in a pink dress, the long lines of the skirt repeating happily the perspectives of the instrument at which she sits, turns over the leaves of old music-books, or invokes the echoes of half-forgotten airs. It is among the simplest and sweetest of Orchardson's later pictures, excelling in design even the beautiful work we reproduce in our frontispiece. *A Tender Chord* is lovely in colour, but as a creation in line it must yield the *pas* to its sister-picture of two years ago. Here the painter has deliberately concocted a *double entente*. His title may be taken, if you like, to refer to the sounds produced by the young fingers straying pensively over the keys; but it may refer just as well to the chord of delicate pinkish tones in which most of the work is done. *Her First Dance* is another scene from the days of short waists and conspicuous ankles. A girl stands up to open a ball with a young buck whose self-satisfaction is fanned by the too evident timidity of his partner. The room has not filled yet, and

in its empty spaces the girl looks like a veritable Iphigenia, waiting for the knife. The picture reads like a page from Miss Austen, whose delicate literary workmanship is represented by the delightful colour and airy, silvery tone of Orchardson's painting.

*Hard Hit* has technical affinities with *Her First Dance*. The ample spacing, the high key, the cool silvery tonality, the infinitely subtle



*Her First Dance.*

*By permission of Messrs. Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell, owners of the copyright.*

contrasts of the one picture are repeated in the other. Both are full of light, atmosphere, and tone. In spite of what the hasty critic might call empty spaces, there is no sense of paint. The broad surfaces of white panelled wall play all over with tone and colour. In spite of their superficial baldness they are full of infinity, and not an inch degenerates into mere pigment. Imagine, too, the difficulty of painting all those cards, so that they should seem neither too monotonous nor too various, so that they should at once look what they are, a multitude of squares of



one colour, receiving the light at a hundred ever so slightly varied angles, and each affected, in its own degree and way by its own number of spots of red or black, and fulfilling their proper functions in the scheme. For this part of the picture Orchardson used fifty packs of cards, throwing them down successively at each corner of the table, so that the actual pattern we see represents two hundred packs. The scene recalls the story of how Fox and some kindred spirits once played at Brooks's, from six o'clock one evening to late into the morning of the next day but one, when a servant stood at each man's elbow to tell him what was trumps, and they were all up to their knees in cards! *Hard Hit* was engraved by the late French etcher Champollion—a descendant, I believe, of Champollion the Egyptologist—who contrived to entirely lose its fine tone and delicious colour under an incredible hardness and dryness of method.

## IX

So far little has been said about Orchardson's portraits, and yet the very best of his subject-pictures do not excel, even in interest, such things as the *Mr. Moxon* or the *Sir Walter Gilbey*. These portraits, and many others hardly less fine, have not yet won all the applause they deserve, and they may have to wait some time before they do. They are not painted in the way made fashionable by the rush to Paris. At present, French models are too often accepted without the least attempt at argument as the one touchstone of excellence. Those who seek to guide opinion seem not unfrequently to form their own after the manner of the famous, "Kneller in painting, and Shakespeare in poetry, damme!" And yet, if, instead of taking a contemporary school, with all its temptations to error, for their test, they would turn to those masters who have steadily grown in fame through one generation after another, until, like Shakespeare, they have seated themselves on thrones which no one tries any more to shake, they would find Orchardson bearing the juxtaposition vastly better than some of their idols.

Let us try the comparison here, and let us take no less a man than Rembrandt for our purpose. Supposing we apply the fashionable notion as to how a subject should be looked at, as to how paint should be handled, as to how far objective fact should control the whole performance, to him, we should be forced to allow that three or four living artists are greater painters. Tested in any way whatever, except by the creative force of the imagination displayed in his work, and by the certainty with which he selected those facts which helped him to enforce his own conceptions, Rembrandt's present elevation to the highest summits of art will be difficult to justify. If we judge his colour, or his sense of values, or even, down to a comparatively late period in his life, his hand-



W. & A. G. P. S.

W. & A. G. P. S.

*Au Enigma.*  
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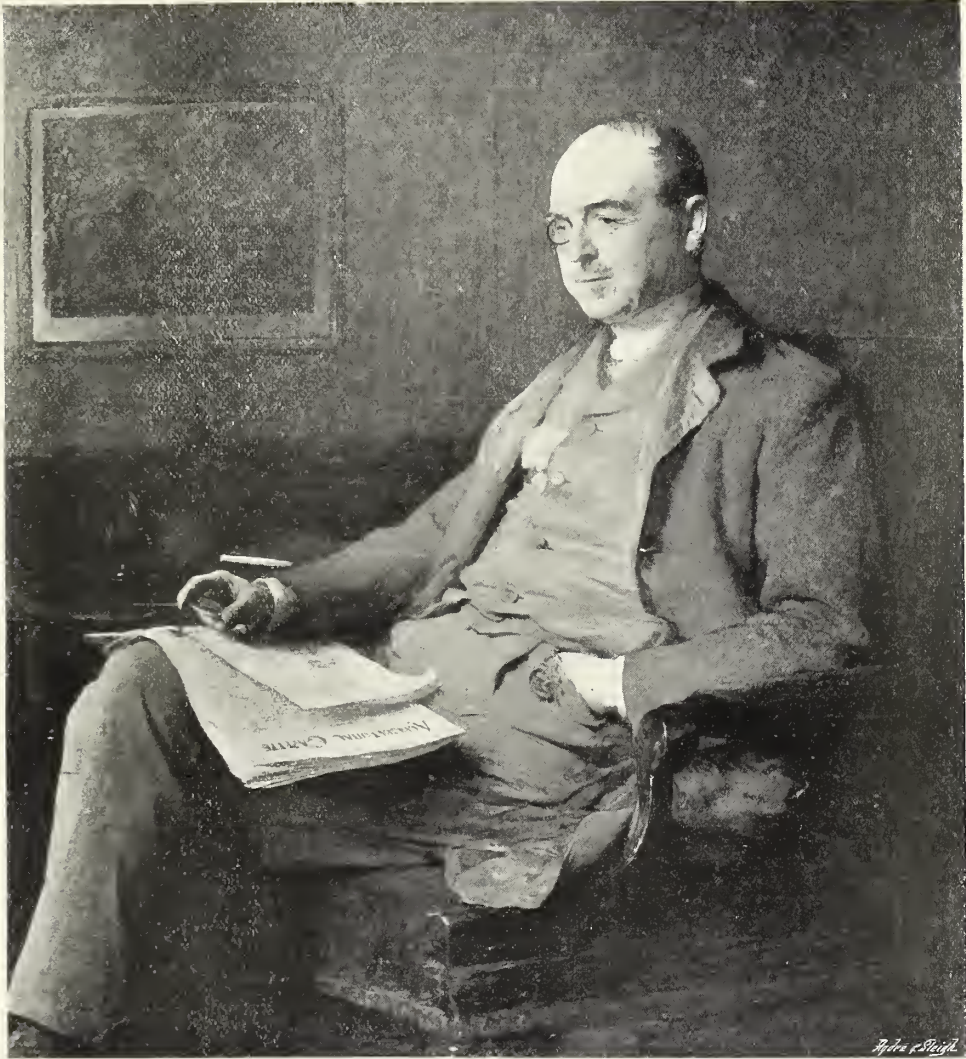




*Portrait of Miss Orchardson.*  
*By permission of W. Q. Orchardson, Esq., R.A.*



ling, by the standards we accept from the French school of the moment, we shall be driven to confess that two or three French and Franco-



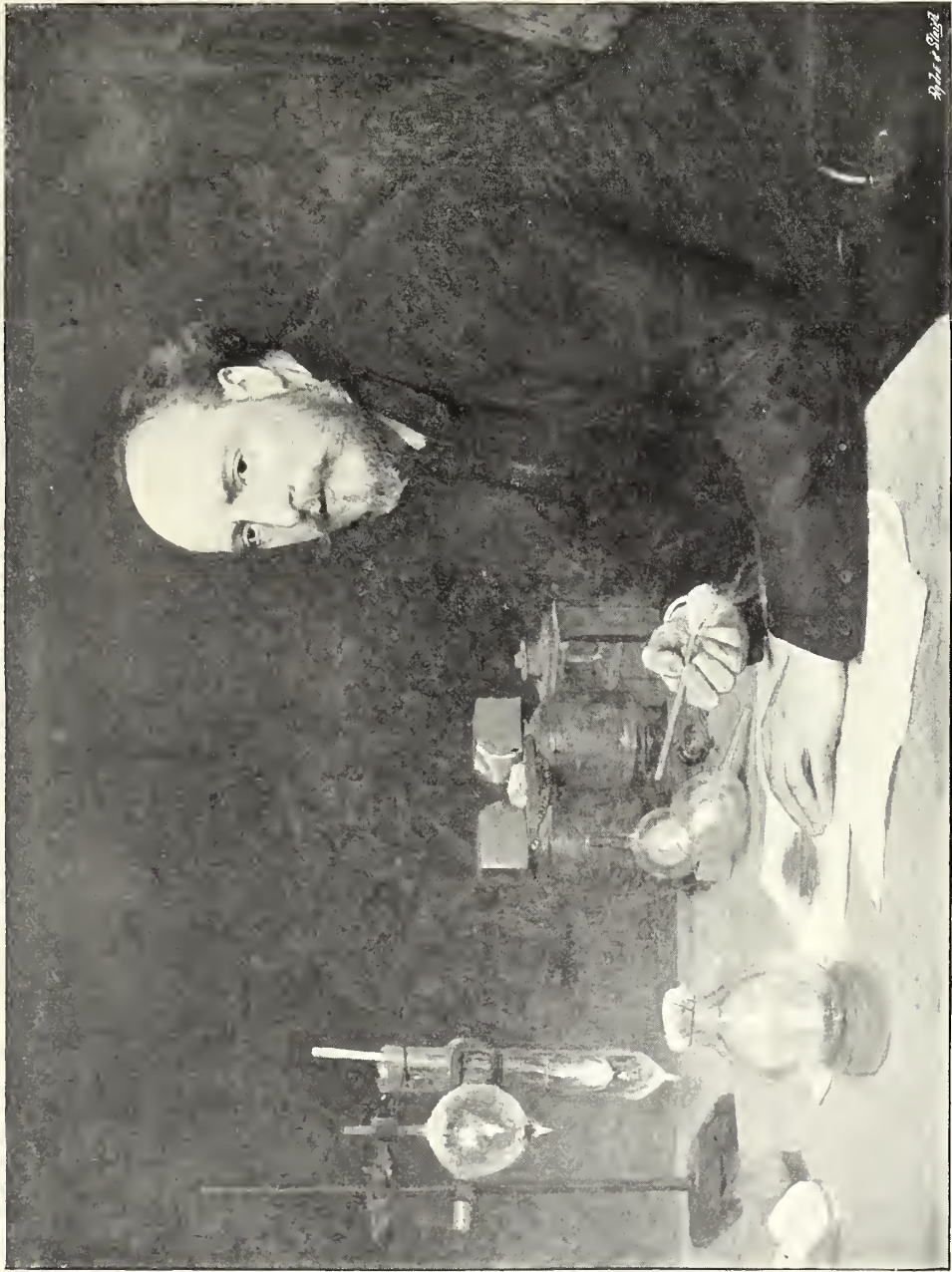
*Sir Walter Gilbey, Bart.*

American painters can beat him. The conceptions of Rembrandt are entirely personal; his objective treatment is governed by the determination to take only what coheres with his individual preferences, modified,

of course, by the necessity for enough truth to prevent any suspicion of incapacity or of poor equipment in himself. Put a head by Rembrandt, say his own head in Lord Ilchester's picture, beside Carolus-Duran's portrait of Pasteur. Compare them in the light of the principles on which the most important section of the French and its affiliated schools work for the moment, and you will be staggered at the result. As a piece of objective truth the Rembrandt will be beaten out of the field. Its colour, illumination, and even to some extent its handling will be recognized as arbitrary. But, nevertheless, you will find the Rembrandt stirring your imagination long after the impression made by the Carolus has faded away. The Dutchman has been able to see the soul, the intellect, the total personality within the outward head, and has been able to select from the facts before him all those, and only those, which actively helped to enforce that personality, and has enhanced them without such violence to truth as to either awaken our resentment or make us doubt his own equipment. Put as shortly as I can contrive to put it, the finest portrait painter is the one who most completely succeeds in building an organic pictorial structure upon the character of his sitter. The sitter gives the keynote, the splendour of the harmony depends upon the artist.

So far as this conviction will guide us, such a portrait as Orchardson's *Sir Walter Gilbey* has a right to a higher place than the best work now being done by any French painter. This does not mean that I want to put our English master on a level with Rembrandt, but simply that the essential principles on which they work are the same, and that those principles alone lead to the highest art. Look at the *Sir Walter Gilbey*, or the *Mr. Moxon*, or the *Mrs. Joseph*, or at a still quieter conception which was at the Academy some ten years ago, *Mrs. Ralli*, or even at his more decorative and less closely organized performances, such as the *Sir Andrew Walker* and the *Professor Dewar*. In these creations you will find a grip on the personalities before him, an instinctive determination to make those personalities his keynotes, and a power to compel every touch he puts upon the canvas to at once give vivacity to the expression of the sitter's character, and to prove, subjectively, that thus and thus only the artist intended to present him, which approach the painter of the *Syndics*, and excel anything of the same kind we ever





*Portrait of Professor Dewar.  
From the picture at Peter-house, Cambridge.*

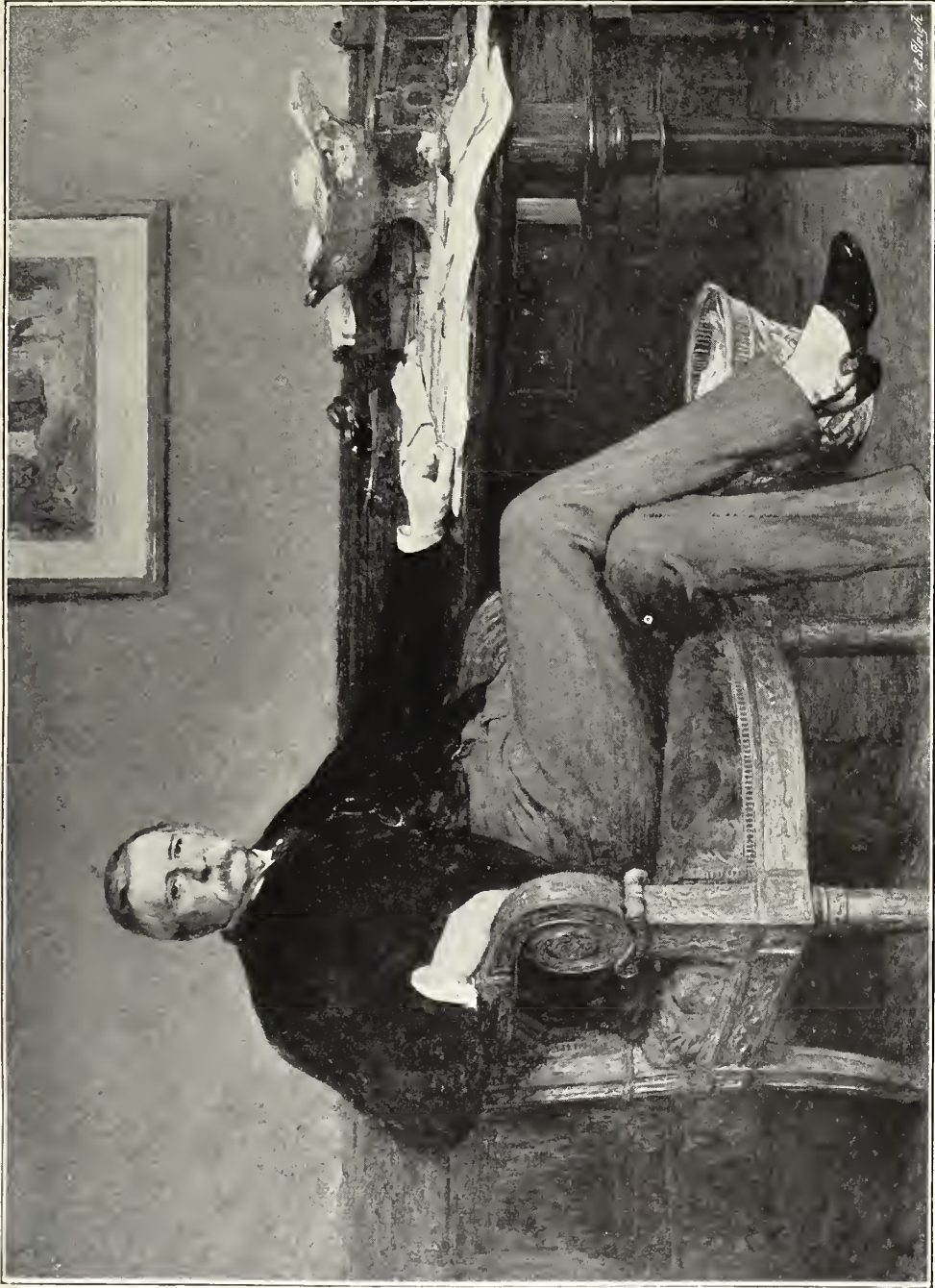


now see at the Salon. For the Dutchman and the Englishman objective truth is a medium for the strongest possible enforcement of a subjective, æsthetic conception, while the French school is apt to concentrate its attention mainly on the objective qualities, using the subjective ones merely for control and restraint. On the one side we have passionate, on the other dispassionate, statements; on the one side science in a rich robe of art, on the other science to which art has granted a scanty rag to veil her nakedness.

And this brings me back to the theory from which I started, that all fine art which works through imitation must be a happy mixture of objective and subjective qualities. The imitation or reproduction of objects is the medium through which the personal conceptions have to be made visible, and so it must be good enough not only to avoid giving offence or betraying weakness, but even to give a certain amount of pleasure for its own sake. But as the gratification we receive from the best imitation is both limited in quantity and not of the highest order in kind, it should not be allowed to substitute itself for those subjective, expressional qualities whose power to give enjoyment is as wide as the capacities of the human mind. The objective side of such an art as painting has a limit, which is reached as often by a South Kensington student as any one else. You cannot go beyond illusion in that direction, and yet illusion will only give you the sort of pleasure you derive from looking at a rope-dancer. The subjective side has no limits upwards, although its base, as it were, is limited by the conditions of the materials in which you work. Objectively the artist has to satisfy the critical sense; subjectively he has to stimulate the sympathetic imagination as vigorously as he can. Between these two constituents of a work of art there can be no doubt, I imagine, as to which should hold the higher rank. One exists for its own sake, the other as an antecedent necessity to its companion.

The great charm of Orchardson appears to me to lie in a happy union of these two characteristics. Facts have a powerful fascination for him. Look, for instance, at the heap of maps in his *Napoleon at St. Helena*. These were painted from a set actually prepared for the 1805 campaign in Germany, which the painter spent weeks in hunting up. Evidence to the same effect is conspicuous all over his work.

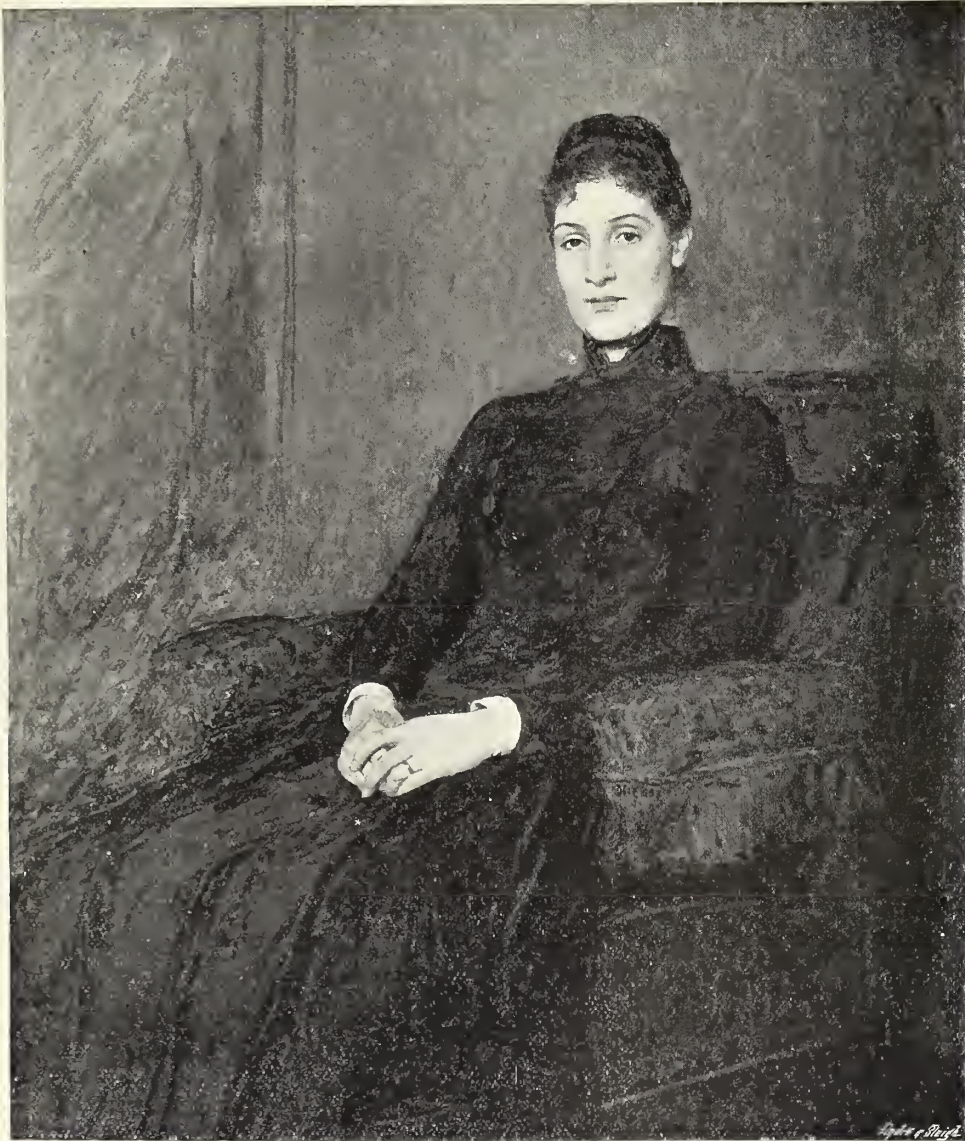
And yet this scientific interest never gets the upper hand; the modulating personality never yields or slumbers. The cadence of the lines pursues its unerring way through and about every object set upon the canvas, building up and enriching the general harmony, and providing a skeleton, well knit and most dexterously articulated, for the whole conception. To this result his powers of drawing contribute enormously. He is one of the very few painters whose drawing is in their bones. It is sometimes by no means literal; with a pair of compasses and a treatise on proportion you might now and then convict a limb of being too long. But it never fails in subtlety; it is always intensely vital and consistent with the movement of the scene, and it never betrays the slightest sense of labour. He seems, indeed, to revel in feats of draughtsmanship which almost any other painter would avoid. Into a small picture, which may possibly be seen at the next Academy—the subject is a young woman in a conservatory—he has gratuitously introduced about as irksome an object to draw as can well be imagined. It is one of those hammered iron tripods, in which all sorts of intricate curves have to be followed through their convolutions with extreme precision if, at the end, they are to look at all probable and organic. Who else would add to the difficulties of such a subject as the *Young Duke*, the extra task of putting in a *nef*, with all its complication of ropes, ports, and arbitrary bends and planes? Look at our plate after *Hard Hit*. Note the crystal chandelier, with its dozens of scintillating pendants and the skeleton of gilded bronze peeping through them here and there. Let your eye search among the various *dejecta* from a night of dissipation which load a side table, and you will find all sorts of unconsidered trifles which help to tell the story, such as the wig of the chief swindler, hung inside out upon a bottle, so that its owner's head may stay cool enough for his purpose. All these things are drawn with delightful precision and painted with an unsurpassable eye for their envelope of light and colour. Turn back to our reproduction of his study for the head, shoulders, and arms of Madame Récamier. Who has excelled it in elegance and in that justness of accent in which lies the highest test of draughtsmanship? Slight as it is, the best drawings of many men more famous as draughtsmen would look amateurish beside it.



*The late Sir A. B. Walker, Bart.  
By permission of Sir Peter Walker, Bart.*



About his colour there may be more dispute. Occasionally it rises to a very high level indeed, as in the *Voltaire*, and such less ambitious



*Mrs. Joseph.*  
By permission of Mrs. Joseph.

things as *A Tender Chord* and *Music when Sweet Voices die*. In his early period it was full of the most delicate grays, and was as a rule

silvery in tone. I have already quoted the similitude found for it by Mons. Ernest Chesneau, which so happily characterized the harmonies of green, gray, gray-brown, and blue we find in so many of his pictures before 1880. Since that date a tendency towards a brassy yellow has occasionally over-asserted itself, and perhaps he has been a little overfond of schemes in which the chief and all the minor parts were played by a brownish buff! But when at his best, as in the three pictures just named, Orchardson has no superior as a colourist. Just now, when we so often hear the painter restricted in theory to a bare imitation of natural colour, this assertion will not find general acceptance. And yet the objectors themselves will go down on their knees before the *Bacchus and Ariadne* of Titian, the *St. George* of Tintoretto, the *Rape of the Sabines* of Rubens, and a hundred other pictures in which a gorgeous convention has been substituted for any attempt to render the literal tints of nature. The question, again, is one of the due proportions between subjective and objective elements, only that here we at last find these opposing, or parallel, or complementary qualities, which ever we may elect to call them, difficult to reconcile. It is enough for the present to point out that those in whom the world agrees to see its greatest colourists have been the most personal in their dealings with colour, have taken the widest liberties with nature, have shown the greatest audacity in elaborating splendours of their own in which to clothe the sedateness of the world about them.

The final verdict on Orchardson will have to be given by posterity, but he who can put fine colour and exquisite design at the service of a sound judgment and of an essentially pictorial imagination, may trust his reputation to his pictures with complete equanimity.



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