

# RAEBURN

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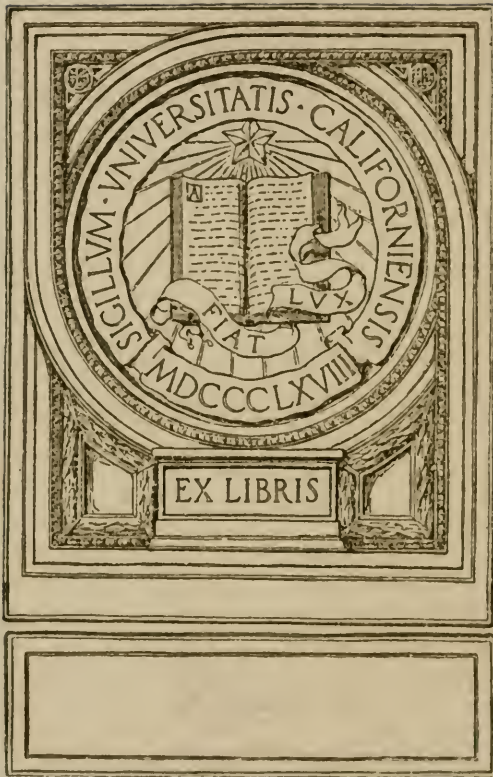


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# RAEBURN

1756—1823

## IN THE SAME SERIES

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ROMNEY.	C. LEWIS HIND.
GREUZE.	ALYS EYRE MACKLIN.
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BELLINI.	GEORGE HAY.
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REMBRANDT.	JOSEF ISRAELS.
LEIGHTON.	A. LYS BALDRY.
RAPHAEL.	PAUL G. KONODY.
HOLMAN HUNT.	MARY E. COLERIDGE.
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TINTORETTO.	S. L. BENSUSAN.
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FRANZ HALS.	EDGUMBE STALEY.
VAN DYCK.	PERCY M. TURNER.
LEONARDO DA VINCI.	M. W. BROCKWELL.
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WHISTLER.	T. MARTIN WOOD.
HOLBEIN.	S. L. BENSUSAN.
BURNE-JONES.	A. LYS BALDRY.
VIGÉE LE BRUN.	C. HALDANE MACFALL.
CHARDIN.	PAUL G. KONODY.
FRAGONARD.	C. HALDANE MACFALL.
MEMLINC.	W. H. J. & J. C. WEALE.
CONSTABLE.	C. LEWIS HIND.
RAEBURN.	JAMES L. CAW.
JOHN S. SARGENT	T. MARTIN WOOD.

*Others in Preparation.*

PLATE I.—LORD NEWTON (Frontispiece).  
(National Gallery of Scotland.)

This chef-d'œuvre, which dates from about 1807, represents one of the most celebrated characters who ever sat upon the bench of the Court of Session. Famous in his day for "law, paunch, whist, claret, and worth," the exploits of Charles Hay, "The Mighty," as he was called, have become traditions of the Parliament House. (See p. 79.)









# RAEBURN

BY JAMES L. CAW ❁ ❁ ❁  
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**W**HEN in 1810, Henry Raeburn, then at the height of his powers, proposed to settle in London, Lawrence dissuaded him. It is unnecessary, as it would be unjust, to insinuate that the future President of the Royal Academy had ulterior and personal motives in urging him to rest content with his

supremacy in the North. Raeburn was fifty-five at the time, and, after his undisputed reign at home, even his generous nature might have taken ill with the competition inseparable from such a venture. Lawrence's advice was wise in many ways, and Raeburn, secure in the admiration and constant patronage of his countrymen, lived his life to the end unvexed by the petty jealousy of inferior rivals. Nor was recognition confined to Scotland. Ultimately he was elected a member of the Royal Academy, an honour all the more valued because unsolicited. Yet, had the courtly Lawrence but known, acceptance of his advice kept a greater than himself from London, and, it may be, prevented the perpetuation and further development of that tradition of noble portraiture of which Raeburn, with personal modifications, was such a master. For long also it confined the Scottish painter's reputation to his own country. Forty years after his death, his art was so little known in England that the Redgraves, in their admirable history of English painting, relegated him to a chapter headed "The Contemporaries of Lawrence." Time brings its revenges, however,

PLATE II.—CHILDREN OF MR AND THE HON. MRS  
PATERSON OF CASTLE HUNTLY. (Charles J. G.  
Paterson, Esq.)

Painted within a year or two of Raeburn's return from Italy, some critics have seen, or thought they saw, in this picture the influence of Michael Angelo. Be this as it may, the handling, lighting, and tone and disposition of the colour are eminently characteristic of much of the work done by Raeburn about 1790.







and of late years Raeburn has taken a place in the very front rank of British painters. And, if this recognition has been given tardily by English critics, the reason is to be found in want of acquaintance with his work. He had lived and painted solely in Scotland, and Scottish art, like foreign art, so long as it remains at home, has little interest for London, which, sure of its attractive power, sits arrogantly still till art is brought to it. But Raeburn's work possesses that inherent power, which, seen by comprehending eyes, compels admiration. The Raeburn exhibition held in Edinburgh in 1876 was quite local in its influence, but from time to time since then, at "The Old Masters" and elsewhere, admirable examples have been shown in London; and recent loan collections in Glasgow and Edinburgh, wherein his achievement was very fully illustrated, were seen by large and cosmopolitan audiences. And the better his work has become known, the more has it been appreciated. Collectors and galleries at home and abroad are now anxious to secure examples; dealers are as alert to buy as they are keen to sell; prices have risen steadily from



the very modest sums of twenty years ago until fine pictures by him fetch as much as representative specimens of Reynolds and Gainsborough. Fashion has had much to do with this greatly enhanced reputation, but another, and more commendable cause of the appreciation, not of the commercial value but of the artistic merit of his work, lies in the fact that the qualities which dominate it are those now held in highest esteem by artists and lovers of art. Isolated though he was, Raeburn expressed himself in a manner and achieved pictorial results which make his achievement somewhat similar in kind to that of Velasquez and Hals.



## I

**I**F, during the last century, Scotland has shown exceptional activity in the arts, especially in painting, and has produced a succession of artists whose work is marked by able craftsmanship and emotional and subjective qualities, which give it a distinctive place in modern painting, the more than two hundred years which lay between the Reformation and the advent of Raeburn seemed to hold little promise of artistic development. During the Middle Ages and the renaissance the internal condition of the country was too unsettled and its resources were too meagre to make art widely possible. Strong castles and beautiful churches were built here and there, but intermittent war on the borders and fear of invasion kept even the more settled central districts in a state of unrest. Moreover, the fierce barons

were at constant feud amongst themselves, and not infrequently the more powerful amongst them were banded against the King. Of the first five Jameses only the last died, and that miserably, in his bed. The innate taste of the Stewarts, no doubt, created an atmosphere of culture in the Court, and this tendency was further strengthened by commercial relations with the Low Countries and political associations with France. Poetry and scholarship were encouraged, if poorly rewarded—one remembers Dunbar's unavailing poetical pleas for a benefice—and relics and old records show that even in those stirring times life was not without its refinements and tasteful accessories. Yet only in the Church or for her service was there the quietude necessary for art work of the higher kinds. Then came the Reformation (during which much fine ecclesiastical furniture and decoration perished) severing the connection of art with religion and sowing distrust of art in any form.

Had the Union of the Crowns not taken place in 1603, it is possible that the art of painting might have developed much earlier than it did.

No doubt that event brought healing to the long open sore caused and inflamed by kingly ambitions and national animosities, but it removed the Court to London, and with that some of the greatest nobles, while the change in the religion of the ruling house from Presbyterianism to Episcopacy, which followed, led to the Covenants and the religious persecution, and drove the iron of ascetism into the souls of those classes from whom artists mostly spring. Yet the logical rigidity of the Calvinistic spirit, while taking much of the joy out of life and opposing its manifestation in art, had certain compensating advantages. Disciplining the mind, quickening the reasoning powers, and cultivating that grasp of essentials which makes for success in almost any pursuit, and not least in art, it helped very largely to make the Scot what he is.

During the peaceful years which immediately followed the Union, there was considerable activity in the building of country residences. Now that the country was more settled these were less castles than mansions, and the larger and better lighted apartments possible led to a

good deal of elaborate decoration. Of this Pinkie House (1613) with its painted gallery is perhaps the most celebrated example. It is difficult, however, to determine how much of this kind of work was done by foreign, how much by native craftsmen, and as it seems to have exerted little influence upon the one or two picture-painters who emerged during the seventeenth century, one need not discuss the probabilities. So far as has been discovered, the only link between this phase of art and the other consists of the fact that George Jamesone (1598?-1644), the first clearly recognisable Scottish artist, was apprenticed in 1612 to one John Andersone "paynter" in Edinburgh, whose decoration in Gordon Castle is mentioned by an old chronicler. As might be expected in the circumstances the "Scottish Van Dyck," as he is fondly called, was a portrait-painter. He was followed by a few others, such as the Scougall family, Aikman Marshall, Wait, and the two Alexanders, who, although neither so accomplished nor so much appreciated as their precursor, form a never quite broken succession of portraitists between him and Allan Ramsay (1713-84) in whose work art

in Scotland took a great step forward.<sup>1</sup> A few of Ramsay's predecessors had succeeded in supplementing the meagre instruction—if any thing that existed could be dignified by that name—to be obtained in Scotland by a visit to the Low Countries or Italy, but Ramsay was the first to obtain a sound technical training. The author of "The Gentle Shepherd," to whom Edinburgh was indebted for its first circulating library and its first play-house, encouraged his son's bent for art, and after some preliminary study in London, Allan *filis* was sent to "The seat of the Beast" beyond the Alps, where he became a pupil of Solimena and Imperiale and of the French Academy. Formed under these influences, his style possesses no clearly marked national trait, except it be the feeling for character which informs his finer work and makes it, in a way, a link between that of Jamesone and that of Raeburn. To this he added a delicate sense of tone and a tenderness of colour and lighting, a gracefulness of drawing and a refined accomplishment which

<sup>1</sup> J. Michael Wright (1625?-1700?), at his best probably the finest native painter of the seventeenth century, went to England.



were new in Scottish painting. His turn for charm of pose and grace of motive was pronounced, and his portraits mirror very happily the mannered yet elegant social airs of the mid-eighteenth century. More than that of any English painter of his day, his art possesses "French elegance."

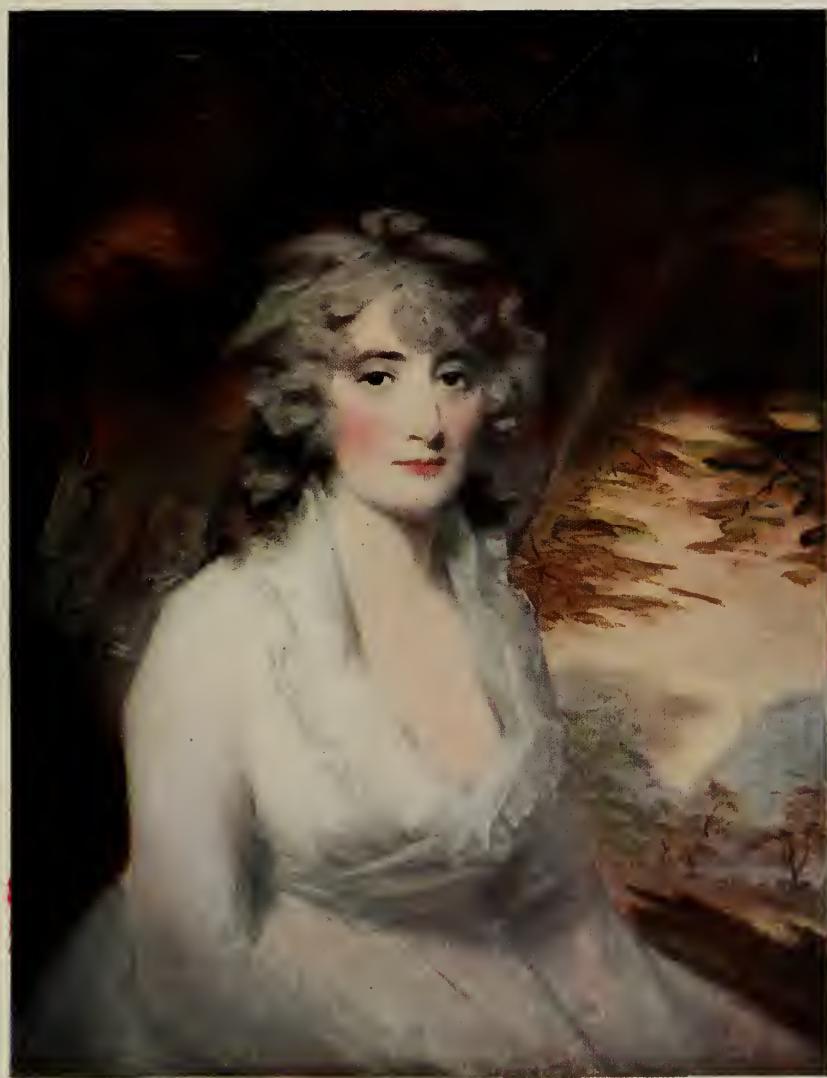
Ramsay's activity as a painter coincided with a remarkable intellectual movement which, making itself felt in history, philosophy, science, and political economy, raised Scotland within a few years to a conspicuous intellectual place in Europe. A product of the reaction which followed the narrow and intense theological ideals which had dominated Scotland, it was closely associated with the reign of the Moderates, who, with their breadth of view, tolerance, and intellectual gifts had become the most influential party in the National Church. Offering an outlet for the human instincts and secular activities, it possessed special attraction for independent minds and induced boldness of speculation and original investigation of the phenomena of history and society. Intimate with the leaders in this movement, Ramsay, before he left Edinburgh

PLATE III.—MRS LAUZUN. (National Gallery.)

Only one of the three Raeburns in the National Gallery is an adequate example. This is the picture reproduced. It was painted in 1795, and, while very typical technically, possesses greater charm than most of the portraits of women executed by him at that comparatively early date.









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for London, was active in the formation (1754) of the "Select Society," which in addition to its main object—the improvement of its members in reasoning and eloquence—sought to encourage the arts and sciences and to improve the material and social condition of the people. It was in this more genial atmosphere that Henry Raeburn was reared.

Born in 1756, Raeburn was not too late to paint many of the most gifted of the older generation. David Hume, who sat to Ramsay more than once, was dead before the new light rose above the horizon, and the appearance of Adam Smith does not seem to be recorded except in a Tassie medallion; but Black, the father of modern chemistry, and Hutton, the originator of modern geology, were amongst his early sitters; and fine works in a more mature manner have Principal Robertson, James Watt, the engineer, Adam Ferguson, the historian, Dugald Stewart, the philosopher, and others scarcely less interesting for subject. And of his own immediate contemporaries — the cycle of Walter Scott—he has left an almost complete gallery. Nor were his sitters less

fortunate. If they brought fine heads to be painted, he painted them with wonderful insight, real grasp of character, and great pictorial power.

## II.

**D**ESCENDED from a race of "bonnet-lairds," who took their name from a hill farm in the Border district, Robert Raeburn, the artist's father, seems to have come to Edinburgh as a young man in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. At that time the city had expanded but little beyond the limits marked by the Flodden wall. The high grey lands along the windy ridge between the Castle and Holyrood were still tenanted by the upper classes, and such extension as had been towards the Meadows. The new town had not been projected even, and on the slopes, now occupied by its spacious streets and squares, copse-woods and grass and heather grew. In the hollow at the foot of these green braes, and by the side of the Water of Leith, a chain of little hamlets—Dean, Stockbridge, and Canon-mills—nestled, and in the mid-most of these

Robert Raeburn established himself as a yarn-boiler. Although in the country, his home was less than a mile from St Giles's Kirk. His business appears to have prospered, and during the early forties he married Miss Ann Elder. There was a difference of twelve years in the ages of their two sons, William and Henry, and the younger was no more than six when both father and mother died. Left to the care of his brother, who carried on the business, Henry Raeburn was nominated for maintenance and education at Heriot's Hospital by Mrs Sarah Sandilands or Durham in 1764, and remained seven years in the school, which owed its origin to the bequest of George Heriot, jeweller to James VI. and I. in Edinburgh and later in London. Many boys had been educated on "Jingling Geordie's" foundation, but Raeburn was to be its most distinguished product. He does not seem to have distinguished himself specially as a scholar, however, the two prizes awarded to him having been for writing, and at the age of fifteen or sixteen he was apprenticed to a jeweller and goldsmith in Parliament Close. This choice of



a calling was probably suggested by the lad's own inclinations, but it was a stroke of good fortune that gave him James Gilliland as a master. No craft then practised in the Scottish capital was so likely to have been congenial to him. In the eighteenth century a silver-smith made as well as sold plate and ornaments, and in his master's shop Raeburn must have learned to use his hands and may have acquired some idea of design. In addition Gilliland seems to have been a man of some taste—one of his most intimate friends, David Deuchar, the seal-engraver, devoted his leisure to etching, and executed many plates after Holbein and the Dutch masters. It was to the latter that Raeburn owed his first lessons in art. Surprising his friend's apprentice at work on a drawing of himself, Deuchar, struck by the talent displayed, inquired if he had had any instruction. No, he had not, wished he had, but could not afford it, the youth replied; and Deuchar's offer to give him a lesson once or twice a week was accepted eagerly. The story is pleasant and circumstantial enough to be credible; and the existence of an early

Raeburn miniature of Deuchar is evidence of the existence of friendship between the two. But, as a free drawing-school had been founded in 1760 by the Honourable the Board of Manufactures for the precise object of encouraging and improving design for manufactures, the impossibility of Raeburn receiving instructions of some kind was less than seems to be implied.

It is true, of course, that the teaching then given was exceedingly elementary, and that it was not until after the appointment in 1798 of John Graham<sup>1</sup> (1754-1817) as preceptor that the Trustees' Academy was developed and began to exercise a definite and indeed a profound influence on Scottish painting. From 1771, the year in which Raeburn left Heriot's, until his death, Alexander Runciman (1736-85), the "Sir Brimstone" of a convivial club of the day and an artist of great ambition and some gifts, if little real accomplishment, in history painting, was master, however, and tradition has it that Raeburn took the tone of his colour from that painter's work. But no record exists of Raeburn having been a pupil

<sup>1</sup> Sir David Wilkie, Sir William Allan, and others were pupils of Graham.



of the school, and he does not appear to have received any more training than was involved in the relationships with his master and his master's friend which have been described. Even subsequent introduction to David Martin (1737-98), who settled in Edinburgh in 1775, when Raeburn was nineteen, meant little more. By that time, or little later, he had almost certainly come to an arrangement under which his master cancelled his indenture, and received as compensation a share in the prices received for the miniatures to which Raeburn now chiefly devoted himself, and for which Gilliland probably helped to secure commissions. These miniatures, of which few have survived, recognisable as his work at least, possess no very marked artistic qualities. Drawn with care and not without considerable sense of construction, they are tenderly modelled but not stippled, and the colour is cool and rather negative in character. The frank way in which the sitters are regarded, and the lighting and placing of the heads are almost the only elements which hint their authorship. They are simple and straight-

forward likenesses rather than works of art and bear no obvious relationship to the elegant bibelots or deeply-searched portraits in little of the contemporary English school of miniaturists. But obviously they were some preparation for the development which followed, when, soon afterwards and almost at once, he passed from water-colour miniature to life-size portraiture in oil paint.

The rapid expansion of Edinburgh provided new opportunities and helped to Raeburn's early success. When he was eight years old the building of the North Bridge, which was to connect the old city with the projected new town on the other side of the valley, was begun, and by the time he attained his majority many of the well-to-do had migrated. The new district meant bigger houses and larger rooms, and, with the increase in wealth which followed the commercial and agricultural development of the country of which the city was the capital, led to alterations in the habits and expansion of the ideals of its inhabitants. It was probably the opening for an artist offered by these altered circum-

**PLATE IV.—MRS CAMPBELL OF BALLIEMORE.**

(National Gallery of Scotland.

This is one of the finest of the many fine portraits by Raeburn in the Edinburgh Gallery. Its place in the artist's work is discussed on page 63.







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stances which had brought Martin to Edinburgh, and certainly Raeburn was fortunate in that his emergence coincided with them. An attractive and clever lad devoting himself to art in a community increasing in wealth and expanding in ideas, and with a sympathetic master coming in contact with the upper classes, Raeburn could not fail to make acquaintances able and willing to help him. Amongst these was John Clerk, younger of Eldin, later a famous advocate, through whom the young artist got into touch with the Penicuik family which for several generations had been notable for its interest in the arts. And this would lead to other introductions.



### III.

**T**HE influences which affected Raeburn and the models upon which he formed either his style or his method are difficult to trace. Allan Ramsay, having painted many portraits in Edinburgh before he went to London in the same year as Raeburn was born, would be, one would think, the most likely source of inspiration. Except Runciman, who occasionally varied historical subjects by portraits painted in a broad but somewhat empty manner, and Seaton, an artist of whom little is known but whose rare and seldom seen portraits possess a breadth of handling and a simplicity of design which give the best of them a certain distinction—can they have been an influence with Raeburn?—the Scottish portrait-painters of the eighteenth century were much influenced by Ramsay, and Martin had been his favourite pupil. Raeburn's connection with the latter was very slight, however. Beyond giving the youth the entree to



his studio and lending him a few pictures to copy, Martin does not seem to have been of much direct assistance, and even these little courtesies come to an end when the painter to the Prince of Wales for Scotland unjustly accused the jeweller's apprentice of having sold one of the copies he had been allowed to make. Rumour, often astray but now and then hitting the mark, said that the real reason was jealousy of the younger man's growing powers. Raeburn's debt to Ramsay and Martin was therefore inconsiderable and indirect. It is not traceable in the technique or arrangement of his earliest known pictures, such as the full-length "George Chalmers" in Dunfermline Town Hall, which was painted in 1776, when the artist was twenty. Probably sight of Martin's pictures in progress was an incentive to work rather than a formative influence on his development as a painter. He had, says Allan Cunningham, writing within a few years of Raeburn's death, "to make experiments, and drudge to acquire what belongs to the mechanical labour, and not to the genius of his art. His first difficulty was the preparation of his colours; putting them on the palette, and

applying them according to the rules of art taught in the academies. All this he had to seek out for himself." And, if probably exaggerated, the statement gives some idea of the difficulties with which he had to contend. There were at that time no exhibitions and no public collections of pictures where a youth of genuine instinct could have gleaned hints as to technical procedure, but there were at least portraits in a number of houses in the city and district, and from these and from prints after the Masters, of which Deuchar, an etcher himself, evidently possessed examples, Raeburn no doubt derived much instruction as to design, the use of chiaroscuro and the like. It has also been suggested with considerable likelihood that mezzotints after portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds had a considerable effect upon him.

Passing from supposition, which, however interesting and plausible, throws no very definite light upon the formation of Raeburn's style, to his early work itself, one finds it chiefly remarkable for frank rendering of character. Obviously he believed in his own eyes, and sought simple and direct ways for the expression

PLATE V.—PROFESSOR ROBISON.

(University of Edinburgh.)

Painted about 1798, "Professor Robison" is one of the most notable portraits painted by Raeburn before 1800. It represents the culmination of his *premier coup* manner. (See pp. 63 and 73.)







of his vision. Certain of what he saw, and desiring to set it down as he saw it, lack of training in the traditional methods of painting by process probably led him to attempt direct realisation in paint. Here is at once the simplest and the most reasonable explanation of how he became an exponent of direct painting, of how, isolated though it was, his art came to be perhaps the most emphatic statement of this particular method of handling between Velasquez and Hals and comparatively recent times. Of course at this early stage his technical accomplishment was not at all equal to his frankness of vision. His drawing, although expressing character, was uncertain and not fully constructive; his sense of design was rather stiff and occasionally somewhat archaic in character; his handling and modelling, if broad and courageous, were insufficiently supported by knowledge; his colour was apt to be dull and monotonous, or, when breaking from that, patchy and crude in its more definite notes which do not fuse sufficiently with their surroundings.

Gradually these deficiencies were mastered, but in some degree they persist in most of the



comparatively few portraits which can be said with certainty to have been painted before he went to Italy. He had been in no hurry to go. Ever since marriage with one of his sitters in 1778, when he was only twenty-two, his future had been secure. The lady, *née* Ann Edgar of Bridgelands, Peebleshire, brought him a considerable fortune. The widow of James Leslie—who traced his descent to Sir George Leslie, first Baron of Balquhain (1351), and who, after his purchase of Deanhaugh in 1777,<sup>1</sup> was spoken of as “Count of Deanhaugh”—she was twelve years the artist’s senior, and had three children; but the marriage turned out most happily for all concerned. Raeburn went to live at his wife’s property, which lay not far from his brother’s house and factory at Stockbridge, and, although sitters increased with his growing reputation until he is said to have been quite independent of his wife’s income, he does not appear to have had a separate studio. Probably his Edinburgh clients

<sup>1</sup> If, as stated by Cumberland Hill in his *History of Stockbridge*, Leslie bought Deanhaugh in 1777, and if, as stated by Cunningham and others, Raeburn married in 1778, the lady can have been a widow for only a few months.



went to Deanhaugh, and at times he seems to have painted portraits at the country houses of the gentry. But in 1785 desire to see and learn more than was possible at home took him to Italy. While in London he made the acquaintance of Reynolds, in whose studio he may have worked for a few weeks, and Sir Joshua's advice confirming his original intention, Raeburn and his wife went to Rome, where they resided about two years. When parting Reynolds took him aside and whispered: "Young man, I know nothing about your circumstances. Young painters are seldom rich; but if money be necessary for your studies abroad, say so, and you shall not want it." Money was not needed, but letters of introduction were accepted gladly; and "ever afterwards Raeburn mentioned the name of Sir Joshua with much respect."

#### IV.

**I**N these days of rapid travel, the transition from north to south is exceedingly striking. Leaving London one speeds past the pleasant Surrey fields and lanes and woodlands, and through the soft rolling green downs, and in the afternoon and evening sees the less familiar but not strange wide planes and poplar-fringed rivers of Northern France, to open one's eyes next morning upon the brown sun-baked lands, with their strange southern growths, which lie behind Marseilles; and all day as the train thunders along the Riviera, through olive gardens and vineyards, one has glimpses of strangely picturesque white-walled and many-coloured shuttered towns fringing the broad bays or clustering on the rocks above little harbours, and drinks a strange enchantment from great vistas of lovely coast washed by blue waters and gladdened by radiant sunshine. And on the second morning, issuing into the great square

before the station, you have your first sight of Rome.

Yet impressive as these transitions are, they are nothing to the contrast which Rome presented to the stranger from the north in the eighteenth century when, after slow and long and weary travelling, he reached his goal. Then Rome was still a town of the renaissance imposed upon a city of the ancients; and under the ægis of the Papacy preserved aspects of life and character which differed little from those of three or four centuries earlier. After the grey metropolis of the north, with its softly luminous or cloudy skies, its sombreness of aspect, its calvinistic religious atmosphere, its interest in science and philosophy, and its want of interest in the arts, the clear sunshiny air of the Eternal City, its picturesque and crowded life, its gorgeous ecclesiastical ceremonies and processions, its monuments of art and architecture, and its cosmopolitan coterie of eager dilettanti discussing the latest archæological discoveries, and of artists studying the achievements of the past, must have formed an extraordinary contrast. Yet Raeburn, much as these novel and stirring

surroundings would strike him, remained true to his own impressions of reality and was unaffected in his artistic ideals. Almost alone of the foreign artists then resident in Rome, he was unaffected by the pseudo-classicism which prevailed. In part a product of emasculated academic tradition, and in part the result of philosophical speculations, upon which the discoveries at Pompeii and the excavations then taking place in Rome had had a strong influence, it was an attitude which founded itself upon the past and opposed the direct study of nature. Gavin Hamilton (1723-98) and Jacob More (1740?-93) two of its most conspicuous pictorial exponents were Scots by birth, but they had lived so long abroad that Scotland had become to them little more than a memory. The work of the former was in many ways an embodiment of the current dilettante conception of art, and kindred in kind, though earlier in date, to that of Jacques Louis David (1748-1825) under whose sway, towards the close of the century, classic ideals came to dominate the art of Europe outside these isles. His usefulness to Raeburn was chiefly that of a cicerone.

There was little of an archæological kind with which he was unacquainted, and he was so famous a discoverer of antiquities that the superstitious Romans thought that he was in league with the devil. The landscapes of More, though highly praised by Goethe, would appeal to Raeburn little more than did the "sublime" historical designs of Hamilton. They were but dilutions, frequently flavoured with melodramatic sentiment, of the noble convention formulated by Claude and the Poussins. Raeburn, on the other hand, had looked at man and nature inquiringly, and had evolved a manner of expressing the results of his observation for himself. Moreover he was past the easily impressionable age, and turned his opportunities to direct and practical uses. He used to declare that the advice of James Byres (1734-1818?) of Tonley, who, in Raeburn's own words, was "a man of great general information, a profound antiquary, and one of the best judges perhaps of everything connected with art in Great Britain," was the most valuable lesson he received while abroad. "Never paint anything except you have it before you" was what



his friend urged, and, while Raeburn, to judge from his early portraits, did not stand greatly in need of the injunction, it probably strengthened him in his own beliefs. Be that as it may he seems to have used his stay in Italy principally to widen his technical experience, and his work after his return was richer and fuller than what he had done previously. No record of any special study he may have undertaken or of the pictures he particularly admired exists. Even gossip is silent as regards his preferences, except in so far as it is said that while in Rome he came near to preferring sculpture to painting.

PLATE VI.—JOHN TAIT OF HARVIESTON AND  
HIS GRANDSON. (Mrs Pitman.)

One of the artist's most virile and trenchant performances, it was painted in 1798-9. The child was introduced after the grandfather's death. (See p. 63.)









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CALIFORNIA

V.

**A**RRIVED back in Edinburgh in 1787, Raeburn took a studio in the new town, and, with his enhanced powers and the added prestige due to his sojourn abroad, soon occupied a commanding place. Few agreed with Martin that "the lad in George Street painted better before he went to Italy," for if the majority were unaware of his high artistic gifts, none could be unconscious of the vital and convincing quality of his portraitures. His earlier sitters included some of the most distinguished people in Scotland. Lord President Dundas must have been amongst the very first for he died before the end of the year. Ere long his position was unassailable, and during the five-and-thirty years that followed he painted practically everybody who was anybody. Burns is probably the only great Scotsman of that epoch who was not immortalised by his brush, for the missing likeness, which has been discovered so often, was not painted from life but from Nasmyth's portrait.

From the time he returned home until 1809,

when he purchased the adjoining property of St Bernard's, Raeburn lived at Deanhaugh.<sup>1</sup> The junction of these small estates enabled him to feu the outlying parts on plans prepared by himself, architecture being one of his hobbies, and his family's connection with them is still marked by such names as Raeburn Place, Ann Street (after his wife), Leslie Place, St Bernard's Crescent, and Deanhaugh Street. Some years earlier continuous increase in the number of his clients had rendered a change of studio desirable, and in 1795 he moved from George Street to 16 (now 32) York Place where he had built a specially designed and spacious studio, with a suite of rooms for the display of recently completed work or of portraits he had painted for himself. At a later date, when exhibitions were inaugurated in Edinburgh (first series 1808-13), he lent the show-rooms to the Society of Artists which organised them. This action was

<sup>1</sup> All Raeburn's biographers follow Cunningham in stating that Raeburn succeeded to St Bernard's on the death of his brother in 1787 or 1788. It was not so, however. The intimation in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, of 13th December 1810, reads, "Died on the 6th December Mr William Raeburn, manufacturer, Stockbridge"; and the title deeds of St Bernard's show that the artist purchased it from the trustees of the late Mrs Margaret Ross in October 1809

typical of Raeburn's cordial relations with his fellow-artists, most of whom were poor and socially unimportant; and only a year before his death he championed the professional artists when, partly in opposition to the Royal Institution, they proposed to form an Academy. Incidentally also, the letter written on that occasion, which I have transcribed in full in *Scottish Painting; Past and Present*, gives an indication of the extent of his practice, of how fully he was engaged.

Until 1808 Raeburn's career had been one unbroken success, but in that year, following upon the failure of his son, financial disaster overtook him. The firm of "Henry Raeburn and Company, merchants, Shore, Leith," consisted of Henry Raeburn, Junior, and James Philip Inglis, who had married Anne Leslie, the artist's step-daughter, but neither the *Edinburgh Gazette* nor the local Directory states the nature of their business. In the proceedings in connection with Raeburn's own bankruptcy, however, he is described as "portrait-painter and underwriter." What underwriter exactly means is uncertain, but it may be that the son was a marine-insurance

broker, that Raeburn himself took marine-insurance risks. In any case his ruin seemed complete. Not only did he lose all his savings but he had even to sell the York Place studio, of which he was afterwards only tenant. He failed, paid a composition, and, two years later, proposed settling in London. By those of his biographers who have noticed it at all, this failure and the contemplated removal south have been very closely associated. But a more careful examination of the whole circumstances makes such an assumption rather doubtful. Alexander Cunningham, in a letter written on 16th February 1808, tells a correspondent—"I had a walk of three hours on Sunday with my worthy friend, Raeburn. He had realised nearly £17,000, which is all gone. He has offered a small composition, which he is in hopes will be accepted. He quits this to try his fate in London, which I trust in God will be successful. While I write this I feel the tear start." So far the connection is evident enough. But although the artist received his discharge in June of the same year,<sup>1</sup> it was not until two years later that he took active steps towards

<sup>1</sup> Henry Raeburn & Co.'s affairs were not settled until March 1810.



carrying out his idea.<sup>1</sup> The time was highly propitious. Hoppner had just died (23rd January 1810), and Wilkie records in his journal (March 2nd) that he had heard that that artist's house was to be taken for Raeburn. Lawrence was now without a rival in the metropolis, and Raeburn's talent was of a kind which would soon have commanded attention there. The opening was obvious, but Raeburn's reception by the gentlemen of the Royal Academy, when he visited London in May, was not very cordial, and fortunately for Scotland, if not for himself, he was persuaded to remain in Edinburgh. From then onward the fates were kind. To quote his own words, written in 1822, "my business, though it many fall off, cannot admit of enlargement."

Wider recognition also came to him. He had exhibited at the Royal Academy as early as 1792, but it was 1810 before he became a regular contributor, and in 1812 he was elected an Associate, full membership following three years later. Just prior to his advancement to Academician rank, he wrote one of the few

<sup>1</sup> That his own affairs were not only settled but were again highly prosperous before this is apparent from his having purchased St Bernard's in 1809.

letters by him that have been preserved:—  
“I observe what you say respecting the election of an R.A.; but what am I to do here? They know that I am on their list; if they choose to elect me without solicitation, it will be the more honourable to me, and I will think the more of it; but if it can only be obtained by means of solicitation and canvassing, I must give up all hopes of it, for I would think it unfair to employ those means.”

No doubt election was particularly gratifying to Raeburn. Isolated as he was in Edinburgh, where an Academy did not come into existence until some years after his death, it must have been stimulating to receive such tangible assurance of that appreciation of one's fellow-workers which is the most grateful form of admiration to the artist. He reciprocated by offering as his diploma work the impressive portrait of himself, which is now one of the treasures of the National Gallery of Scotland. The rules of the Academy, however, forbade the acceptance of a self-portrait, and in 1821 he gave the “Boy with Rabbit”—a portrait of his step-grandson, but one of his most genre-like



pieces. Other Academic diplomas received later were those of the Academies of Florence, New York, and South Carolina.

A year before he died these artistic laurels were supplemented by royal favour. On the occasion of that never-to-be-forgotten event—to those who took part in it—the first visit of a King to Scotland since the Union of Parliaments, Raeburn was presented to George IV. and knighted. His fellow artists marked their appreciation of this fresh distinction by entertaining him to a public dinner, at which the chairman, Alexander Nasmyth, the doyen of the local painters, declared that “they loved him as a man not less than they admired him as an artist.” And in the following May, the King appointed him his “limner and painter in Scotland, with all fees, profits, salaries, rights, privileges, and advantages thereto belonging.”

Raeburn did not long enjoy these new honours. In July, a day or two after returning from an archæological excursion in Fifeshire with, amongst others, Sir Walter Scott and Miss Edgeworth, he became suddenly ill, took to bed, and in less than a week was dead.

## VI.

**W**HILE Raeburn's attitude to reality was determined and his style was formed to a great extent before he went abroad, his ideas of pictorial effect were broadened and his technical resources enriched by his sojourn in Italy. Some of the work executed immediately after his return, such as the portraits of Lord President Dundas, Neil Gow, the famous fiddler, and the earlier of two portraits of his friend John Clerk of Eldin, shows, with much unity, a greater care and precision in the handling of detail, a more searched kind of modelling and a fuller sense of tone, and thicker impasto and fuller colour than that done previously. Moreover the design of the first-named picture is reminiscent in certain ways of Velasquez's "Pope Innocent X.," which he may have seen and studied in the Doria Palace in Rome, though too much stress need not be laid on the resemblance. About this time also, he painted a few pictures in

**PLATE VII.—MISS EMILY DE VISMES—LADY  
MURRAY. (Earl of Mansfield.)**

An admirable example of the artist's mature style, and one of his most charming portraits of women. (See p. 79.)







which difficult problems of lighting are subtly and skilfully solved. In things like the charming bust "William Ferguson of Kilrie" (before 1790) and the group of Sir John and Lady Clerk of Penicuik (1790) the faces are in luminous shadow, touched by soft reflected light to give expression and animation. But for obvious reasons such effects are not favoured by the clients of portrait-painters, and that Raeburn should have adopted them at all is evidence of the widening of the artistic horizon induced by his stay abroad.

In pictures painted but little later than these, one finds a marked tendency to revert to the more abbreviated modelling and broader execution which have been noted as characteristic of his pre-Roman style. The execution, however, is now much more confident and masterly, the draughtsmanship better, the design, while exceedingly simple, less stiff and more closely knit. Using pigment of very fluid consistency and never loading the lights, though following the traditional method of thick in the lights and thin in the shadows, his handling is exceedingly direct and spon-



taneous, his touch fearless and broad yet thoroughly under control, his drawing summary yet selective and so expressive that, even in faces where the lighting is so broad that there is little shadow to mark the features and little modelling to explain the planes, the large structure of the head and the essentials of likeness are rendered in a very satisfying and convincing way. His colour, however, if losing the inclination to the rather dull grey-greenness which had prevailed before 1785, remained somewhat cold and wanting in quality, and the more forcible tints introduced in the draperies were frequently lacking in modulation and were not quite in harmony with the prevailing tone. Something of this deficiency in fusion is also noticeable in his flesh tints, the carnations of the complexions being somewhat detached owing to defective gradation where the pinks join the whites. As experience came, Raeburn advanced from the somewhat starved quality of pigment, which in his earlier pictures was accentuated by his broad manner of handling, until in many of the pictures painted during the later nineties he attained extraordinary



power of expression by vigorous and incisive use of square brush-work and full yet fluid and unloaded impasto. This method with its sharply struck touches and simplified planes reaches its climax perhaps in the striking portrait (1798 circa) of Professor Robison in white night-cap and red-striped dressing-gown, though the more fused manner of "Mrs Campbell of Balliemore" (1795) and the extraordinary trenchant handling of the "John Tait of Harvieston and his grandson" (1798-9) show modifications which are as fine and perhaps less mannered. Even earlier he sometimes attained a solidity and forcefulness of effect, a fullness of colour, and a resonance of tone which gave foretaste of the accomplishment of his full maturity. Curiously this is most marked in two or three full-lengths. The earliest of these was the famous "Dr Nathaniel Spens" in the possession of the Royal Company of Archers, by which body it was commissioned in 1791. In its close realisation of detail and restraint in handling are very happily harmonised with breadth of ensemble and effectiveness of design. Some five years later this fine achievement was

followed by the even more striking, if rather less dignified, "Sir John Sinclair," a splendid piece of virtuosity, which unites brilliant colour and admirable tone to great dash and bravura of brush-work.

During this period, and indeed throughout his career, Raeburn usually placed his sitters in a strong direct light, which, being thrown upon the head and upper part of the figure (from a high side-light) illumined the face broadly, and, while emphasising the features with definite though narrow shadows, made it dominate the ensemble. Very often this concentration of effect was associated with a forced and arbitrary use of chiaroscuro. In many of his pictures one finds the lower portion of the figure, including the hands, low in tone through the artist having arranged a screen or blind to throw a shadow over the parts he wished subordinated. This device appears in full-lengths as well as in busts and threequarter-lengths, and while, no doubt, helping to the desired end, is now and then a disturbing influence from the fact that it is difficult to account for the result from purely normal causes. With Rembrandt, the greatest

master of concentrated pictorial effect, the transitions from the fully illumined passages to the surrounding transparent darks are so gradual and so subtle that one scarcely notices that the effect has been arranged—the concentration is an integral part of the imaginative apprehension of the subject. It is otherwise with Raeburn, in his earlier work at least. Later he attained much the same results by less arbitrary and apparent means, by swathing the hands and arms—the high tone of which he evidently found disconcerting and conflicting with the heads—in drapery, by placing them where they tell as little as possible, and by modifications in handling. His management of accessories was also determined by desire for concentration. Although, as is obvious from his increasing use of it, preferring a simple background from which the figure has atmospheric detachment, he frequently used the scenic setting which Reynolds and Gainsborough had made the vogue. His idea, however, was that a landscape background should be exceedingly unassertive — “nothing more than the shadow of a landscape; effect is all that is wanted” — and, always executing

them himself, his are invariably subordinate to the figure. But the essential quality of his vision went best with plain backgrounds. That he did not wholly abandon the decorative convention which he heired, and often employed to excellent purpose, was due in large measure to caution. "He came," says W. E. Henley, "at the break between new and old—when the old was not yet discredited, and the new was still inoffensive; and with that exquisite good sense which marks the artist, he identified himself with that which was known, and not with that which, though big with many kinds of possibilities, was as yet in perfect touch with nothing actively alive." Yet, had he had the full courage of his convictions, his work would have been an even more outstanding landmark in the history of painting than it is. Still to ask from Raeburn what one does not get from Velasquez, many of whose portraits have a conventional setting, is to be more exacting than critical, and, as has been indicated, simplicity of design and aerial relief became increasingly evident in Raeburn's work, and that in spite of the protests of some of his admirers.

While Raeburn had been working towards a fuller and more subtle statement of likeness, modelling, and arrangement, it is possible that removal to his new studio accelerated development in that direction. The painting-room had been designed by himself for his own special purposes, and no doubt suggested new possibilities. In any case, the portraits painted after 1795 reveal a definite increase in the qualities mentioned. But before considering the characteristics of his later style, it might be well to tell what is known of his habits of work and technical procedure. Cunningham's summary of these applies partly to the George Street and partly to the York Place period, but for practical purposes they may be regarded as one, for, while Raeburn's art may be divided into periods, each was but a stage in a gradual and consistent evolution. "The motions of the artist were as regular as those of a clock. He rose at seven during summer, took breakfast about eight with his wife and children, walked into George Street, and was ready for a sitter by nine; and of sitters he generally had, for many years, not fewer than three or four a day. To these he gave



an hour and a half each. He seldom kept a sitter more than two hours, unless the person happened—and that was often the case—to be gifted with more than common talents. He then felt himself happy, and never failed to detain the party till the arrival of a new sitter intimated that he must be gone. For a head size he generally required four or five sittings: and he preferred painting the head and hands to any other part of the body; assigning as a reason that they required less consideration. A fold of drapery, or the natural ease which the casting of a mantle over the shoulder demanded, occasioned him more perplexing study than a head full of thought and imagination. Such was the intuition with which he penetrated at once to the mind, that the first sitting rarely came to a close without his having seized strongly on the character and disposition of the individual. He never drew in his heads, or indeed any part of the body, with chalk—a system pursued successfully by Lawrence—but began with the brush at once. The forehead, chin, nose, and mouth, were his first touches. He always painted standing, and never used a stick for resting his

PLATE VIII.—MRS SCOTT MONCRIEFF.

(National Gallery of Scotland.)

None of Raeburn's portraits of ladies is quite so famous as this. Although in indifferent condition owing to bitumen having been used, it is singularly charming in colour, design, and sentiment, and is one of the chief treasures of the gallery, in which it has hung since 1854, when Mr R. Scott Moncrieff, Welwood of Pitliver, bequeathed it to the Royal Scottish Academy. (See page 79.)





hand on; for such was his accuracy of eye, and steadiness of nerve, that he could introduce the most delicate touches, or the almost mechanical regularity of line, without aid, or other contrivance than fair off-hand dexterity. He remained in his painting-room till a little after five o'clock, when he walked home, and dined at six. . . . From one who knew him in his youthful days, and sat to him when he rose in fame, I have this description of his way of going to work. "He spoke a few words to me in his usual brief and kindly way—evidently to put me into an agreeable mood; and then having placed me in a chair on a platform at the end of his painting-room, in the posture required, set up his easel beside me with the canvas ready to receive the colour. When he saw all was right, he took his palette and his brush, retreated back step by step, with his face towards me, till he was nigh the other end of the room; he stood and studied for a minute more, then came up to the canvas, and, without looking at me, wrought upon it with colour for some time. Having done this, he retreated in the same manner, studied my looks at that distance for about another

minute, then came hastily up to the canvas and painted for a few minutes more." These details may be supplemented by the list of colours used by him, which Alexander Fraser, R.S.A., gave in *The Portfolio*. "His palette was a simple one; his colours were vermilion, raw sienna (but sometimes yellow ochre instead), Prussian blue, burnt sienna, ivory black, crimson lake, white, of course, and the medium he used was 'gumption,' a composition of sugar of lead, mastic varnish, and linseed oil. The colours were ground by a servant in his own house and put into small pots ready for use." When one adds that his studio had a very high side-light, and that he painted on half-primed canvas with a definitely marked twill, all that is known of his practice has been noted.

As already suggested, Raeburn's style was tending towards greater completeness of expression and more naturalness of arrangement before he removed to York Place in 1795, but, while his normal advance was in that direction, it was so gradual that it is only by looking at a number of pictures painted, say, five or ten years later, and comparing them with their

predecessors that one notices that the advance was definite and not casual. Occasionally, as in the "Professor Robison," there is a very emphatic restatement of a somewhat earlier method; but, as the "Lord Braxfield" of about 1790 is a premonition of a much later manner, this exceptional treatment seems to have been inspired by the character of the sitter having suggested its special suitability. But comparing the splendid group, "Reginald Macdonald of Clanranald and his two younger brothers" (about 1800), or the "Mrs Cruikshank of Langley Park" (about 1805), with typical examples painted between 1787 and 1795, one finds the later pictures marked not only by increased power of drawing and more masterly brush-work but by a finer rendering of form, by greater roundness of modelling, and by a more expressive use of colour and chiaroscuro.

Considerable ingenuity has been expended in trying to prove that Raeburn's subsequent development was due in some way or other to the influence of Hoppner and Lawrence. Consideration of his situation and of his work itself, however, scarcely bears this out. His ignorance

of what was being done by London artists, and of how his own pictures compared with theirs, is very clearly evident from the following letter written to Wilkie:—

Edinburgh,  
*12th September 1819.*

Mr dear Sir,—I let you to wit that I am still here, and long much to hear from you, both as to how you are and what you are doing. I would not wish to impose any hardship upon you, but it would give me great pleasure if you would take the trouble to write me at least once a year, if not oftener, and give me a little information of what is going on among the artists, for I do assure you I have as little communication with any of them, and know almost as little about them, as if I were living at the Cape of Good Hope.

I send up generally a picture or two to the Exhibition, which serve merely as an advertisement that I am still in the land of the living, but in other respects it does me no good, for I get no notice from any one, nor have I the least conception how they look beside others. I know not in what London papers any critiques of that kind are made, and our Edinburgh ones (at least those that I see) take no notice of these matters. At any rate I would prefer a candid observation or two from an artist like you, conveying not only your own opinion but perhaps that of others, before any of them.

Are the Portrait-Painters as well employed as ever? Sir Thomas Lawrence, they tell me, has refused to commence any more pictures till he gets done with those that are on



hand, and that he has raised his prices to some enormous sum. Is that true, and will you do me the favour to tell me what his prices really are, and what Sir W. Beechy, Mr Philips, and Mr Owen have for their pictures? It will be a particular favour if you will take the trouble to ascertain these for me precisely, for I am raising my prices too, and it would be a guide to me—not that I intend to raise mine so high as your famous London artists.

Moreover he is said to have visited London only three times: in 1785, when he spent several weeks while on his way to Italy; in 1810, when he contemplated settling there; and in 1815, after he was elected an Academician. It is of course only with the later visits that we have to do in this connection. By that time Hoppner was dead, and Lawrence's claim to be painter par excellence to the fashionable world was undisputed. No doubt the Scottish painter would be attracted by the technical accomplishment of Lawrence's work; but he was between fifty and sixty years of age and little likely to be influenced by an art, which, for all its brilliance, was meretricious in many respects. Yet it is possible that the adulation lavished by society upon his contemporary's style may have induced him to consider if something of

the elegance for which it was esteemed so highly could not be added with advantage to his own. On the other hand, Scottish society was gradually undergoing evolution, and, while a greater infusion of fashion amongst its members would in itself tend to stimulate the favourite painter of the day in the same direction, increase in wealth would bring a greater number of younger sitters to his studio. Probably a combination of these represents the influences which affected Raeburn. In any case, his later portraits, especially of women, possess qualities of charm and beauty which, while never merely pretty or meretricious, connect them in some measure with the more modish and less sincere and virile work of Lawrence. But otherwise—and, unlike his southern contemporaries, he never sacrificed character to elegance or subordinated individuality to type—the evolution of his style continued on purely personal lines. The pictures painted between 1810 and his death, while still at the height of his powers, are essentially one with those of the preceding decade. There is in them a more delicate sense of beauty than before, and his portraits



of ladies are marked by a quickened perception of feminine grace and charm; but these are results of the natural development of his nature and of his personal powers of expression rather than of any radical alteration in his standpoint.

As regards the work of the last fifteen years and more, it is less increased grasp of character, for that had always been a leading trait, than growth in the expressive power and completeness of his technique that is the dominating factor. And here the prevailing qualities are but the issue of previous experience. His modelling ceases to be marked by the rough-hewn and over simplified planes which had distinguished his incisive square-touch at its strongest and becomes fused and suave. As Sir Walter Armstrong put it, "He began with the facets and ended with the completest modelling ever reached by any English painter." Now his colour not only loses the inclination to flatness and monotony, which were evident before 1795, and sometimes even later, but, the half-tones being more delicately graded, the transitions, though still lacking the subtleties of the real colourist, are blended and the

general tone enriched and harmonised. And his use of chiaroscuro becomes infinitely more delicate both in its play upon the face and in the broad disposition, which now attains finer and more convincing concentration in virtue of more skillful subordination through handling, as well as through more pictorial management of his old arrangement of lighting. Moreover the scenic setting, if retained in many full-lengths, is to a great extent abandoned for a simple background lighted from the same source as the sitter, and against which face and figure come in truer atmospheric envelope and relief. With these alterations, which were not perhaps invariably all gain, his later work now and then lacking the delightfully clear and incisive brushing of the preceding period, were also associated a fuller and fatter body of paint which, while never loaded, gives richness of effect, and a sonorousness of tone which his earlier pictures rarely possess.

A sympathetic and human perception of character was the basis of his relationship to his sitters, each of whom is individualised in a rarely convincing way, and to me at least the

view of life expressed in his later pictures seems more genial and comprehending than that which dominates his earlier work. Comparatively this is perhaps especially evident in his rendering of pretty women. "Mrs Scott Moncrieff," "Miss de Vismes," "Miss Janet Suttie," and "Mrs Irvine Boswell," to name no more, are all beauties; but each differs from the others, and is marked by personal traits to an extent unusual in his earlier practice. Still his grasp of character is more obviously seen in his portraiture of older women and of men, and his masterpieces are to be found amongst his pictures of this kind rather than amongst his "beauty" pieces, seductive though the best of these are. When one thinks of his finest and most personal achievements, one recalls such things as "Lord Newton," "Sir William Forbes," and "James Wardrop of Torbanehill," or "Mrs Cruikshank," and "Mrs James Campbell."

Born a painter of character, Raeburn was at his best where character, intellect, and shrewdness were most marked. Yet axiomatic though it may sound, this implies great gifts.

To seize the obvious points of likeness, and make a portrait more living than life itself is comparatively easy; but to grasp the essential elements of likeness and character, and, while vitalising these pictorially and decoratively, to preserve the normal tone of life is difficult indeed. Of this, the highest triumph of the portrait-painter's art as such, Raeburn was a master.



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