

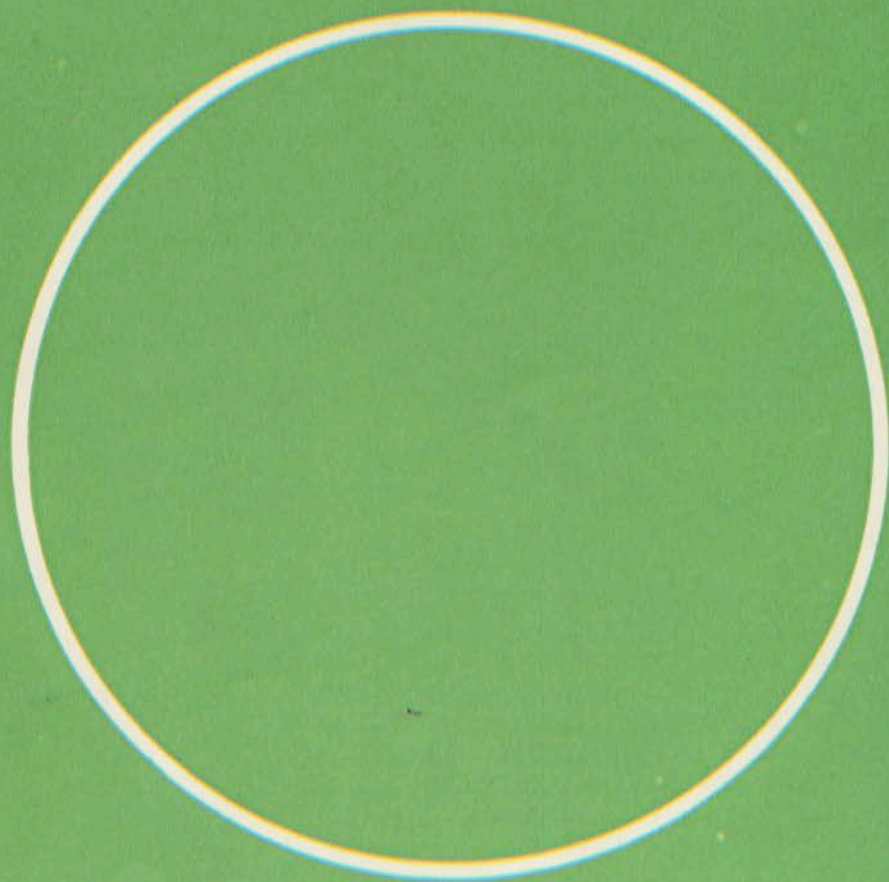
THE STUDIO

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF PORTRAIT PAINTERS

By HERBERT A. OLIVIER, R.I.

GEORGE SHERINGHAM, R.D.I.

C. R. W. NEVINSON, A.R.A. By F. G. MORIES



SEPTEMBER 1945

TWO AND SIX NET

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF PORTRAIT PAINTERS

By HERBERT A. OLIVIER, R.I.



Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, O.M., R.A. (1836-1912)
"Portrait of the Artist's Daughter"

IN this brief article it is only possible to mention the beginning and aims of the above Society; to describe its constitution, record its difficulties and successes; but not to insert what might be more interesting—memories of those who have given time to its affairs, and added to its artistic lustre.

The principal reasons for portrait painting being vanity and affection, it is natural that its practitioners should pander to the first and gratify the second by exhibiting their products.

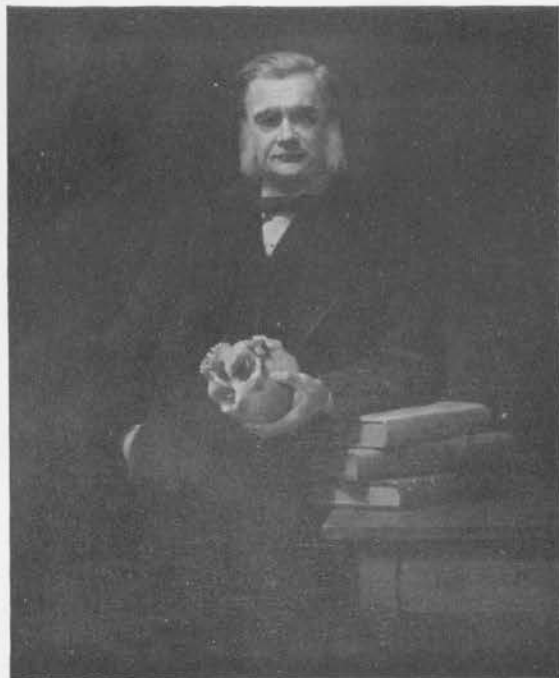
Moreover as the relative merits of portraits are better gauged in exhibitions consisting solely of portraits, the following painters met together in March, 1891, in Stuart-Wortley's studio: John Collier, J. J. Shannon, Jacombe-Hood, Melville, Lavery, Vos, Symonds, Furse, Hacker, Leslie Ward, Glazebrook, Skipworth,

Haywood-Hardy and Bigland; and having put their host in the chair, they considered the possibilities of holding such an exhibition at the Royal Institute Galleries. After discussing the approximate number of members, their privileges and liabilities, they raised a guarantee fund, and elected a sub-committee to confer with the aforesaid Gallery. They also secured an Exhibition Secretary, General Manager and Treasurer.

At their next meeting all names answering an informative circular were balloted for, including those who attended the first meeting, and twenty-four were elected Members. It was decided to invite a limited number of non-Members, both at home and abroad, to contribute to the first exhibition in June, 1891. These included Leighton, Millais, Herkomer, Fildes, Dicksee, Llewellyn, Watts and Whistler; and from abroad, Fantin-Latour, Carolus, Duran and Bonnat.

At the second exhibition at the Institute, Whistler and Watts became Members, and Tadema and Millais the first two Honorary Members.

In 1893 we tried the newly opened Grafton Gallery,



Hon. John Collier, O.B.E. (1850-1934). *"Thomas Henry Huxley, P.R.S."* (Courtesy: Athenæum Club)



Sir John Lavery, R.A. (1857-1941). "R. B. Cunninghame Graham". (Glasgow Art Gallery)

but for 1894-5 the better placed New Gallery.

When back again at the Grafton in 1896, the Secretary requested the Council to meet on October 5. But as he failed to appear they opened the Society's box, the lock of which had been forced. Within was confusion, and everything to do with the bank was missing.

A chartered accountant, and a copy of the bank ledger disclosed the fact that we had a deficit of £319; but neither the then Secretary nor his whereabouts were ever heard of again by us.

In July, 1897, the constitution and rules having been settled, John Stuart-Wortley became the first President, instead of chairman. The Hon. John Collier, Vice-President, acting pro tem as Treasurer, with Hugh de T. Glazebrook as Hon. Secretary.

Four officers were elected annually, and were assisted by a Council, holding office for two years. Half of their number retired annually to make place for fresh members. Three members of the "Hanging" Committee were elected at the Annual General Meeting, the other three coming on in alphabetical rotation, the officers and Council revising the exhibition.

Only at the General Meeting were Honorary Members elected. One of the first, Sir John Millais, had died, though fortunately Tadema remained; so Watts, Whistler and Orchardson were added.

In 1899, hoping to obtain a permanent home for ten years the Society again moved to the New Gallery, taking with them the Society of Miniaturists, and including busts by well-known sculptors.

The vogue for portraiture increased, and the membership being limited, the "Modern" Society was started.

The first President, Stuart-Wortley, to whom so much was

owed, died on October 11th, 1905, and on November 9th a second was elected, Sir W. Q. Orchardson, R.A.

A letter was drafted in his name at the end of 1909 which reads: "On the eve of making further arrangements for a further term at the New Gallery". Evidently nobody anticipated that the latter would cease as such without much warning. When it ceased, Howard, who, on taking over the Grafton, had tried to persuade the Society to go there, was approached as to terms; but there was no room for our Society there.

A statement also appeared in the press to the effect that "now the original Society of Portrait Painters had ceased to exist, a new Society calling itself the 'National' had been formed, comprising the 'Modern' and all the best known members of the old Society, including Sargent". But the latter, together with others repudiated this statement.

However, as it was obviously necessary to hold an exhibition at once in order to show that the Society was still alive, I, now on the Council, acting as Hon. Secretary in Glazebrook's absence, was empowered to accept an offer from the old Water-Colour Society's gallery for September and part of October.

At this juncture, to everybody's regret, Glazebrook, who had always kept the Society in touch with foreign painters, resigned the Hon. Secretaryship on the score of ill-health, and I was elected in his place.

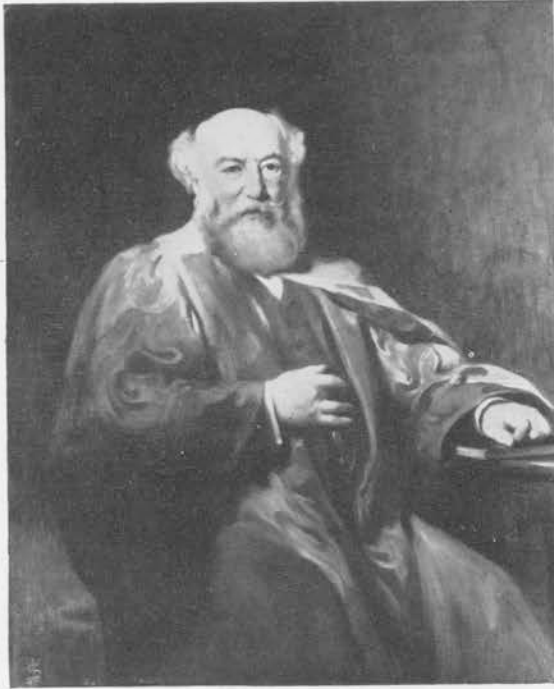
Naturally, the presidency was offered to Sargent, who declined on the plea of having given up portraiture! So on May 28, 1910, the General Meeting in Lavery's studio elected Shannon as President.

The new President welcomed all meetings at his studio, and it was stated at the



John Singer Sargent, R.A. (1856-1925). "Lord Ribblesdale". (London: Tate Gallery)

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Solomon J. Solomon, R.A. (1860-1927). "Dr. Ludwig Mond". (London: National Portrait Gallery)

first Council Meeting there, that the 1911 Coronation Exhibition at Shepherd's Bush had offered the Society two galleries. Moreover, Wade, the present Grafton Gallery director, had offered us his galleries for January and February, 1912.

Our 21st year seemed an excuse for getting ourselves made a Royal Society. Tadema and Sir Edwin Poynter, now one of our Honorary Members, to whom, as President of the Royal Academy, such questions are referred, helped us, as did also Sir Edward Troup, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, and Lord Stamfordham, through whom as the King's Secretary the Society's prayer to His Majesty would be made. Both put things in order, as they did at a later date when a knighthood for Shannon was asked for.

To relieve the Vice-President, Hugh Riviere became Hon. Treasurer on March 10th, and two of our most valued members, Birley and Harcourt, together with da Costa, became members.

Then on July 19th, 1911, the four officers of the Society invited members to dine in our Section at the Coronation Exhibition, and Shannon announced that: "His Majesty the King had been graciously pleased to command that the Society, which has now attained its 21st year, shall be known in future as 'The Royal Society of Portrait Painters'".

The Society now dug itself in at the Grafton for some years, and sandwich-men carried a poster

designed by Greiffenhagen, which is still used. An Illustrated Catalogue was started, using "R.P." as an outside monogram, and in 1912 the Society broke out into a "Banquet" for 110, when the Lord Chief Justice, the U.S. Consul General, Anthony Hope, George Frampton, Comyns Carr and Littleton spoke.

As secretarial work increased, and as our old New Gallery friend, Leonard Lindsay, had acted as secretary for some time, without remuneration, the Society asked him to be an Hon. Lay Member so as to keep him in touch, and they were fortunate in obtaining the help of C. R. Chisman as acting secretary.

Sargent, in spite of a letter that "the idea of a portrait nauseated him", always supported the Society's exhibitions, though he chaperoned his work carefully. Once, fancying that we had invited a group of his without consulting him, he remonstrated, and when reassured to the contrary, he wrote confessing that when a Provincial Exhibition informed him that "he'd be glad to learn they'd secured some excellent examples of his work" (without asking him), he sent them a postcard with the word "damn" rubber-stamped on it.

We had tried to start "outings", and a beanfeast at



Sir James J. Shannon, R.A. (1862-1923). "Phil May". (London: Tate Gallery)

Totteridge House possibly induced McLure Hamilton, always a staunch supporter, to entertain the Society at Twickenham. But the first world war came along and stopped such social gatherings. We could not even assemble Waterloo portraits to commemorate its 1815 centenary. But being in a bellicose mood, the Council decided to ask those whose nationality was quasi-German to forego their privileges—among them Laszlo.

In 1916 Sargent's drawings, and Pavlova dancing at our *soirée* helped the "Arts Fund".

In 1917 before being "called up", Chisman arranged an R.P. Exhibition with Dibdin at The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, leaving Mrs. Chisman, and Mrs. Macdonald as Exhibition Secretary, to help the Hon. Secretary to carry on.

During the next two years, Poynter, Hacker and John Charlton (who had often lent his studio) died; and after the 1920 exhibition the Grafton terminated our tenure. Thanks to Lamb, the Royal Academy came to the Society's rescue in 1921, when we included with Millais' *Mrs. Bishoffsheim* other deceased members' works, Richard Jack arranging a *soirée*. But in 1923 our beloved Shannon died, and as the Royal Academy could not help us again, Chisman arranged several provincial shows.

In 1923 the Society took the Suffolk Street Galleries, (Some of us remembered Whistler's remark, when he and others resigned the R.B.A.: "The Artists are



Sir John Everett Millais, R.A. (1829-1896). "Mrs. Bishoffsheim". (Recently presented by Lady Fitzgerald to the National Gallery, London)



Sir William Orpen, R.A. (1878-1931) "Self-Portrait"

going—the British remain".) At a General Meeting there, the majority voted Orpen President. Unfortunately, he was no longer a Member owing to a dispute as to arrears of subscriptions, so a telegram was sent to him at Paris, "If re-elected a Member, will you be our President"? The answer was "Yes", so Orpen now filled that position.

Curiously enough, at our first meeting in his studio, "arrears" had to be dealt with. Finding that his predecessor, usually most punctual, was in our debt, Orpen went to his desk, wrote out a cheque for the amount and whispering to the Hon. Secretary: "That mustn't appear in the Minutes", handed it to him under the table.

Being no longer "in mid-stream", and now having to winter abroad, I suggested Harold Speed as my successor as Hon. Secretary, and the latter having been elected in October took office for our second exhibition at the Royal Academy early in 1924. Works by Shannon were shown, the catalogue was illustrated, Jack again arranging a *soirée*. Somerville became Treasurer in place of Riviere, to whom, together with myself, Orpen made presentations on behalf of members at a dinner at the Arts Club.

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Sir William Llewellyn, G.C.V.O., R.A. (1863-1941).
"Sir William Plender, Bt., G.B.E., LL.D., F.C.A."
(Courtesy of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, and
of Gee and Co. Publishers, Ltd.)



George Frederick Watts, O.M., R.A. (1817-1904). "Walter
Crane". (London: National Portrait Gallery)



Hugh de T. Glazebrook (1855-1937). "Viscount Milner"
(London: National Portrait Gallery)



R. G. Eves, R.A. (1876-1941). "Admiral of the Fleet John,
First Earl Jellicoe of Scapa, G.C.B., O.M., etc." (Courtesy
of Mrs. Eves)

Frank Dicksee, P.R.A., was now elected Hon. Member, and for the next two years the Royal Academy sheltered us. In 1927 the Society had no exhibition, but for the following three years, we were able to take the Grafton, Mercer becoming Hon. Secretary, and Spencer Watson Treasurer. Harris Brown, one of our original members, staged the last of the three annual balls there, as a Waterloo Eve costume spectacle.

Having arranged a 27½ year lease with the Institute Galleries, we now held our exhibitions there each November from 1931 to 1939; but were "bombed out" in 1940. A somewhat abortive effort was made at the beginning of our tenancy to reconsider the position of the Society. The recommendations of the sub-committee which were unfortunately attempted, caused such "ructions" that a General Meeting decided to abandon the report entirely.

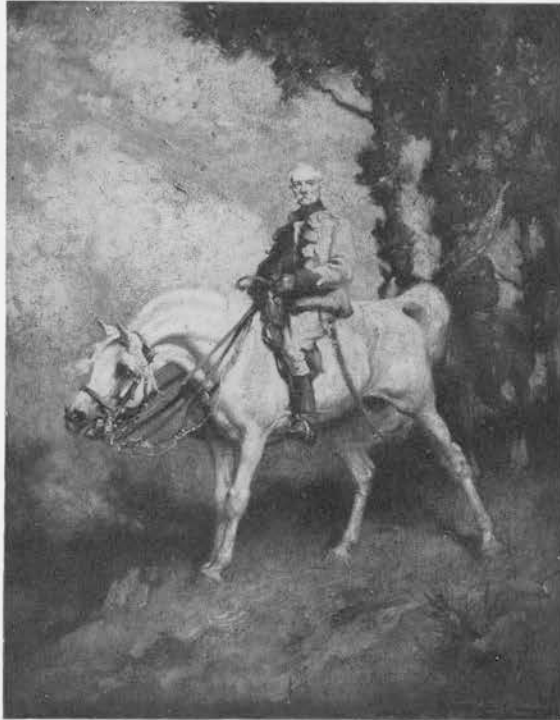
Orpen, who had resigned membership and the Presidency again resumed office, but after a sad illness, died on October 3rd, 1931, and there was a service at St. James's, Piccadilly, in memory of him.

In March the following year Lavery, the gentlest yet most astute of men, was elected President, and Mercer, resigned, having suggested that Riviere might help again.

On December 19th, 1932, an illuminated address was given to dear old Collier, who had fulfilled the office of Vice-President, always steadfastly refusing the "purple" for forty years. A trust deed was drawn up and Birley, Salisbury and Dugdale were elected Trustees on February 17, 1933. MacLure Hamilton was elected an Hon. Member; and later on, for services to the Society, also Hugh G. Riviere, and the writer



James A. McNeill Whistler (1834-1903). "Miss Cicely Alexander: Harmony in Grey and Green". (London: Tate Gallery)



Charles W. Furze, R.B.A. (1868-1904). "Portrait of Earl Roberts"

of this record, both of whom had held office over many years.

Meetings of any sort were difficult owing to war time dispersal. So after Lavery's death in Dublin on June 13, 1941, it was agreed that the election of President and Hon. Secretary should be postponed, and that Harcourt, for some time Vice-President, and Dugdale, Hon. Treasurer and Trustee, together with the other Trustees, Birley and Salisbury, should conduct the affairs of the Society. However, on Varnishing Day, 1944, a very well attended General Meeting elected Harcourt as President, Birley Vice-President and Codner Hon. Secretary, Dugdale being still Hon. Treasurer.

It is impossible to thank the Royal Academy sufficiently for coming to the Society's rescue during these four homeless years.

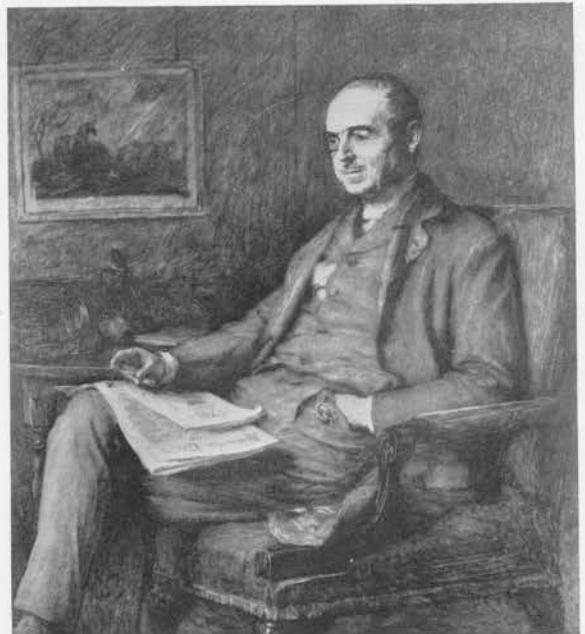
Remembering their Presidents, Yockney, who kindly summarized annual events for this article, pointed out that of those who had contributed to our first exhibition, four had become P.R.A. Of the first two, du Maurier, comparing the insatiable idealism of the one, and the happy materialism of the other, recalled their last utterances. Leighton sent his love to the Academy, but his last remark was "after all life is a failure". Millais, dying of cancer in the throat,

wrote "Give my love to the Academy; I've had a jolly good time".

In spite of marked individualism we all feel the need of corporate unity. Dicksee had this sense of devotion to the body to which he was elected, and although he never was one of our members he was always ready to help any deserving attempt. John Swan said of him that he was "a clean-souled gentleman". Llewellyn was a member, but he left us when elected an associate, feeling intensely his allegiance to the body which he served to the end.

All four had versatile gifts, and therefore sympathy with others. MacWhirter, the landscape painter, said once "that if a man wanted to 'get on' he must stick to one branch of the arts". There is almost a political animus among painters of different styles—Leighton stood long studying Sargent's "Carnation, lily, lily, rose", whereat Greiffenhagen, when asked what he thought of the latter's posthumous exhibition at Burlington House, muttered "Tripe". "What does Mr. Tadema with his Romano-Dutch St. John's wooden eye know about my hanging" asked Whistler, when Tadema ventured to allude to them kindly.

Worldly wisdom at times pardons a little "honest deception". "Tout comprendre est tout pardonner", and if you differ and don't want to help by trying the first, you don't improve anyone's ways, nor maybe your own narrow self.



Sir William Q. Orchardson, R.A. (1835-1910) "Walter Gilbey". Engraving. (Courtesy of the late Sir Walter Gilbey)



P. A. DE LÁSZLÓ (1869-1937)

"HELEN HENSCHEL"

ROYAL SOCIETY OF PORTRAIT PAINTERS



ROYAL ACADEMY

PICCADILLY, W.

JANUARY 19th to FEBRUARY 9th.

DAILY 10 a.m. till 5 p.m. ADMISSION (including Tax) 1/3.