

CHAPTER VII

BROOMIEKNOWE

1889-1910

BROOMIEKNOWE, the Mid-Lothian village to which McTaggart removed at Whitsunday, 1889, lies some seven miles south-south-east of Edinburgh by the Liberton-Lasswade road. Consisting of villas and cottages set amongst fine old trees and pleasant gardens, it is less a place in itself—though having a railway station and a golf-course bearing the name—than the western suburb of the small burgh of Bonnyrigg, of which it forms part. Perched upon the eastern edge of the deep valley, in which the old town of Lasswade nestles beside the river, the houses on that side look towards the boldly silhouetted peaks of the Pentlands across the romantic wooded glen, through which the North Esk winds on its way from Hawthornden to Melville Castle. On the other fringe of the village the view is quite different in character. Here the land slopes gently towards the sunrise and the rich and softly undulating Lothian fields, between the two Esk rivers, spread out before one until beyond the low-lying woods at Newbattle Abbey, some two miles away, they surge into the smooth swelling but richly diversified upland known locally as the “Roman Camp.” Farther southward, above the Dalhousie woods and the trees from amongst which the tower of Cockpen Church peeps, the horizon is bounded by the long flat ridges of the Moorfoot Hills. Deanpark, the house in which the artist lived, occupies one of the pleasantest sites with this outlook, and, standing in a large garden with its back to Eldin Dean Road (the “Sandy Dean” of his pictures), might be right in the country, save for a glimpse of the Bonnyrigg houses and steeple through the trees of an adjoining garden. Even now, when Sandy

Dean is better kept but less beautiful, and a picturesque though broken-down row of red-tiled cottages near its foot has been replaced by an ugly small tenement in good repair; when the village of Bonnyrigg has intruded somewhat too far into the middle distance, and the development of the coal seams between Newbattle and Gorebridge has slowly but none the less certainly eaten into the beauty and freshness of the entrancing distance, the view from Deanpark and its garden is quietly delightful. But in his pictures, it is always the aspect it bore when he first went there that appears.

Once settled at Broomieknowe, he found it both a pleasant place in which to reside and a constant source of pictorial interest and incentive. There he had retirement without seclusion. The railway station, conveniently hidden in a deep cutting just beyond the foot of his own garden, brought Edinburgh within half-an-hour's reach, and he had a good many visitors, especially on Saturday afternoons, which he always kept free for social intercourse. Shortly after leaving town he had given up membership of the Scottish Artists Club, of which he had been one of the founders, and his active connection with the Academy was to last only a year or two longer; but until almost the end he was in Edinburgh two or three times a month—calling on friends, seeing exhibitions or sale collections of pictures, or merely as an outing. On these occasions he often walked in, for walking was to him at once the pleasantest sort of exercise, and after this time his only outdoor recreation. Indeed, there was not a byeway for miles round his home that he did not know and love. A Scottish proverb says "A gangin' fit's aye gettin'," and, as he tramped the countryside with open eyes, his memory, already well stored, was still further enriched by sensitive observation of those transient and elusive atmospheric effects which do not recur or wait one's coming, but must be caught on the wing, as it were.

In this new environment the landscape, as distinguished from the seapiece, became once more prominent in his work. During the sixties he had painted the land oftener than the sea, and during the seventies and eighties the sea oftener than the land. Now, however, and during the following twenty years, his attention was divided almost equally between them. Nor is it possible to say in which direction he most excelled. While custom (due in large measure to greater familiarity, through



AUTUMN SHOWERS

exhibition, with his pictures painted between 1870 and 1889) inclines to give the palm to his sea-painting, there are those, and these amongst the best judges, who hold that his landscape is at least no less remarkable. In both there are the same passion for life and nature, the same delight in beauty, the same extraordinary sensitiveness to movement, light and colour. Throughout the preceding chapters the evolution of his style from the delicate elaboration of the sixties, through the expansion of the seventies, to the masterly and suggestive breadth of the eighties has been traced. While at every stage one found emotional harmony between figure-incident and setting, the onward progression was always towards a more unified pictorial expression until, during the last decade, these twin elements contributed to and intensified the beauty of the whole rather than the charm of each. At the same time his already great and still growing command of vitally expressive touch and handling, suggestive drawing, exquisite colour and aerial tone helped to give not only greater unity but increased animation and a heightened spiritual quality to the results attained. The enhancement of all these elements in a highly subtle and imaginatively suggestive fashion, in which representation is completely subordinated to poetic significance without losing that close intimate touch with nature, upon which all creative art depends, forms the essential content and the perennial fascination of the work which was to follow in the nineties and later. So, while the last twenty years of his career constitute what may be described as his latest period (1889-1910), the pictures which belong to it reveal his special gifts not only undimmed but in their fullest and most splendid development.

A born pioneer, McTaggart went on experimenting long after he had achieved reputation and might have been expected to sit down and enjoy his successes by repeating them. Always the hope of doing better, of expressing more fully and significantly the vision of the world which was his, was with him and urged him on. Years before he had said of his critics, "They will change, I cannot," and now, curiously enough, criticism, once so insistent upon what were considered his shortcomings, accepted them not only as incidental to but as expressive of his original outlook and special gifts. So, while it is not to be forgotten that he had always had ardent admirers amongst the critics, appreciation more and more replaced depreciation as the keynote of written commentary on his

work. The times had changed, and criticism with them. This was due in part to familiarity with his exhibited pictures having gradually and unconsciously to themselves educated both critics and public to some appreciation of their special qualities. In part also it was connected with the European movement known generally as impressionism, his relationship to which has been dealt with already. Here, however, it may be suggested that that movement in its turn probably helped towards a fuller appreciation of his achievement.

In an article¹ written for the *Art Journal* in 1894 I attempted to define the position then occupied by McTaggart. "At a time when impressionism is in the air," I wrote, "when criticism is dealing with the practice and biography with its practitioners, it is not a little curious that one so seldom hears the name of William McTaggart mentioned; and yet, before the term had been imported from France, and ere Monet and the rest had formulated their creed, McTaggart had evolved for himself a method and a style, not unlike what they ultimately achieved, but exceeding it in suggestion, significance and beauty. . . . That his work is not better known is possibly accounted for by the fact of his seldom exhibiting out of his own country, by his quiet and unobtrusive life and by his scorn of notoriety and advertisement. But among artists in Scotland he occupies the same unique place as Mr. Watts does in England. All his fellows, irrespective of school or set, respect him—the painters in the West regard him with as much admiration as his associates in the East; and, although he has founded no cult, his influence has been wide and salutary."

Never fond of exhibitions, he now gradually withdrew from them. He continued, indeed, to send regularly to the Scottish Water-Colour Society, and after 1899, when he was elected a vice-president, an important loan picture by him was usually a feature of the annual exhibition of the Society of Scottish Artists. But he was unrepresented at the Royal Scottish Academy after 1895, except in 1903 and 1904 (following Guthrie's election as President) and in 1910 (when the Academy desired to celebrate the jubilee of Hugh Cameron's and his election as Associates), while at the Glasgow Institute, from about the same time, he was seen

¹ 'A Scottish Impressionist,' *Art Journal*, August, 1894. This was probably the first article of the kind devoted to McTaggart's work.

only occasionally in pictures borrowed from collectors by the Council. Nor was he at all favourably disposed towards any project for widening his reputation by showing his work elsewhere. He was satisfied, he would say, with the approbation of those about him. Why should he be urged to desire more? Yet this restriction in public appearances, while retarding his recognition as a master furth of Scotland, seemed to augment rather than diminish his prestige at home; and after the special exhibition of his recent work—little of which had been seen publicly—in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee in the spring of 1901, McTaggart's position as the outstanding figure in Scottish painting was generally acknowledged.¹

Although the famous beauty spots of the district in which he now lived—

“Who knows not Melville's beechy grove,
And Roslin's rocky glen;
Dalkeith, which all the virtues love,
And classic Hawthornden,”

as Sir Walter Scott enumerates them in the ballad of “The Grey Brother,” afforded subjects for some fine pictures, McTaggart found chiefly, and that increasingly with familiarity, pictorial material close at hand. Sandy Dean, the lane near the upper end of which his house stood, and the adjacent fields were from the first a favourite sketching place. The lane itself is not perhaps specially rich in the ready-made picturesque; but, painted during all sorts of weather and at all seasons of the year, the variety and beauty he evoked from its rather ordinary features were remarkable, and were still further varied later, when an extension of his garden gave him glimpses of the same distances over a foreground of grassy knowes, diversified with graceful broom, bushy whin and trailing bramble, at his own studio door.

Perhaps the first oil pictures painted at Broomieknowe were ‘Green Fields,’ ‘Midsummer Day,’ and ‘Hayfield, Broomieknowe.’ An early

¹ It might be more accurate to say that McTaggart shared the headship with his old fellow-student, Orchardson. But, while Orchardson's work was equally admired by Scottish artists and he had a wider reputation, certain qualities in his art (no less than residence in London) made his relationship to Scottish painting less immediate than McTaggart's.

summer landscape with figures, 'Green Fields'¹ was given by the painter to the sale arranged by the East of Scotland artists on behalf of the newly founded Scottish Artists Benevolent Association, in the inception of which he had taken a leading part. Mr. A. K. Brown and he acted as conveners of the Provisional Committee which brought the Association into existence, and from its formation until his death he was a vice-president, and took an active interest in its affairs.

These beginnings were interrupted by a visit to Southend, Kintyre, where he had been the previous year. But while the former sojourn had been given to water-colour, this was devoted to oil, and resulted in a series of highly important pictures. To judge from these, that August must have been an exceptionally charming month. All are reminiscent of the most exquisite weather, still and sunny but clear and fresh, tranquil and serene yet full of magical suggestion. Never before, it seems to me, had he evoked such spiritual harmony and visual beauty from nature or given such exquisite and masterly pictorial expression to his conceptions. Each of the big pictures then painted—'Girls Bathing, White Bay,' 'Ailsa Craig from White Bay,' 'Away o'er the Sea,' 'Where the Smuggler came Ashore,' 'The Sounding Sea'—is a veritable masterpiece.

Immediately after returning from Kintyre, he painted an important landscape, 'Autumn Showers,' which in beauty and charm holds its own with the very best of the Southend pictures, and, ere the gold and russet leaves of October had fallen, he had also garnered a sheaf of lovely water-colours in the wooded roadways about his new home.

It was in the autumn of that year that I first met Mr. McTaggart. Early in the preceding year, just out of my "time" as an engineer, I had come to Edinburgh to be a draughtsman in the works where his eldest son, Hugh, was serving his apprenticeship. Hugh and I were soon on friendly terms, and in October 1889 he brought a message from his father inviting me to Broomieknowe. Delighted with the prospect of meeting an artist for whose work I cherished the highest admiration, I went with great expectations mingled with much diffidence. To me there seemed a great gulf fixed between a famous artist and a youthful

¹ Purchased at the Artists Benevolent Association Sale by Mr. John Millar Crabbie. It was shown at the R.S.A. in 1891.



GIRLS BATHING, WHITE BAY, CANTYRE

enthusiast ; but McTaggart's warm greeting and hearty handshake put me at ease at once, and that Saturday afternoon laid the foundation of a friendship destined to grow warmer and more intimate with every passing year. He was then fifty-four years of age and in the full flood-time of health and power, which, however, were to remain unabated almost to the end. His appearance at that time, and for a good while afterwards, finds most excellent record in the self-portrait painted in 1892 and reproduced as frontispiece to this book. Even without the colour—the clear fresh complexion, tanned with exposure to the sun and wind he loved ; the ruddy brown of beard and bushy eyebrows ; and the sincere and twinkling blue of the eyes, which gave his face a special charm—it is more eloquent and more expressive of his character than any words of mine could be, and so we will leave it, without comment, to speak for itself.

There was to begin with no studio at Deanpark, and on this occasion I did not see any pictures ; but during the following spring, having bought the house in the interval, he had a wooden one—some 23 feet by 16, with windows in all four sides as well as in the roof—erected in the garden, and thereafter I was seldom at Broomieknowe without spending some time with him in the studio. It was considerably later before the big gallery-studio in the lower garden, beneath the tall birch tree which figures in a good many of his pictures, was built.

During the succeeding winter, he was engaged chiefly in introducing figures into several of the landscapes painted at Southend, for, although the incidents were usually conceived at the time the pictures were begun and formed an integral part of the idea, they were not often painted on the spot. In these circumstances comparatively little new work was commenced until the spring ; but a fall of snow prompted a sketch, which was to be the first of not a few fine winter landscapes, and the portrait group of Mrs. McTaggart and her eldest daughter, seen at next year's Academy, was begun and finished. Exhibited as 'Moss Roses,' and spoken of by himself as his 'Madonna,' these two close nestling figures are instinct with a true and deep sentiment, the ardour of which is echoed and enhanced by the rich harmony of creamy flesh colour and glowing crimson in which the picture is carried out. Artistically the finest portrait he ever painted, this lovely group was followed two or three years later

by the equally masterly portrait of himself painting 'A Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn,' already described.

The year 1890 was spent entirely at Broomieknowe, and naturally issued chiefly in landscapes. Amongst these mention may be made of the exquisite spring idyll, 'The Blackbird's Nest,' the lovely summer landscapes, 'Hawthornden' and 'The Fruitseller, Melville Gates,' and the vivid and brilliant 'Autumn Sunshine—Sandy-Dean'; but except the last, which was sent to the Academy of 1891, none of them was exhibited until many years later. His new studio, however, stimulated him to carry out some long-cherished projects. Two themes suggested or begun during his first visit to Carradale seventeen years earlier were now taken up. One was 'The Storm,' the other 'Crofter Emigrants leaving the Hebrides.' For the former he had beside him the very complete study—in itself an important picture—painted out-of-doors, into which figures had subsequently been introduced. Yet fine as that earlier 'Storm' was, it was surpassed in beauty, passion and power by the larger picture painted at this time. Much the same process of evolution marked the production of the 'Emigrants.' The idea, which blossomed in it, had appeared in bud, as it were, in several of his quite early pictures, and, when in 1883 he painted a lovely vision of bright sky and clear blue sea seen from a foreground of rocky knowes, he had no doubt in mind the completion which now took place through the introduction of crofters embarking for America. That, at all events, was his usual procedure. The 'Blue Emigrants,' as it was spoken of at home, was not, however, the final form which this epic of emigration was to take. Another and still another and another, each differing from the others, followed. But discussion of their relationship is better deferred until the following chapter, when some of the most typical of his later pictures will be described and considered, not only in their connection with each other, but, as illustrating the wide scope and remarkable variety of his achievement.

Other fine studio works of this year were the large figure subject, 'Caller Oo!' (56×42), and the delightful cottage interior, 'First Steps.' When first seen at the Academy in 1894 the former was considerably smaller than now, for several years later the artist let out the canvas all round, with distinct improvement to the original design, which

appears in a smaller version in the possession of one of the artist's daughters.

In the spring of 1891 McTaggart's active interest in the Royal Scottish Academy and its affairs came to an end. The occasion (Council meeting, 13th March) was the way in which the then President and Council dealt with the case of David Farquharson (1839-1907), an associate who, having failed to contribute to two successive exhibitions, had become liable to be struck off the roll of those eligible for the Pension Fund. Called upon to give satisfactory reason for his negligence, Farquharson replied that, owing to the illness and death of his brother and his mother and attendant circumstances, he had been unable to finish the works he had intended for the Academy. This letter having been read, was considered by the Council, which, as a whole, took the view that, from other information laid before them by one of their number, the excuse offered was inadequate. McTaggart, on the other hand, thought the reason sufficient and, having expressed his opinion, suggested that it would perhaps be better that he should make a motion to that effect. The President refused to allow this, at the same time suggesting that he would not be able to find a seconder. McTaggart said he could, and urged his right. "But right or wrong," the Chairman retorted, "I refuse to put it to the meeting." After a thrice-repeated appeal to the Council, which, however, was ignored, McTaggart, saying that he could not remain, rose to leave the room. The President now began to realise the gravity of the position, and remarked, "This is serious!" "Yes, it is. Good-bye, gentlemen," said McTaggart: and he left, never again to attend an Academy meeting of any kind. Some four years later (December 1895) it again came to his turn to serve on the Council, but, when this was intimated to him, he wrote explaining that, in view of the way in which the Academy had acted in the Farquharson affair, he could not do so. To this an assembly of Academicians, to whom the matter was then referred, responded that, as the principal actor in that incident was now dead, the Academy could not well go back upon what had taken place, but they would be glad if he would return—they would welcome him back. He thanked them for this "expression of their regret at the wrong done so many years ago"—a phrase which annoyed some of them—and for their message of goodwill; but he did not accept

the invitation. It was not apology but reparation of what he considered a wrong that he desired.¹

Speaking of this rupture, years afterwards, McTaggart told me that it was the injustice that was being done and the meanness of going behind a fellow-member's letter, which between gentlemen should have been taken at its face value, that had stirred his anger and made him act as he did. Yet I cannot but think that, quite apart from the Academy's action in this particular incident, which was, however, exactly of a kind to appeal to his fine sense of justice and his innate impulse to defend the absent or the weak, he was glad to escape from the atmosphere of compromise and privilege which is almost inseparable from such bodies. As he said to one of his dearest friends, when the latter urged him to return to the Academy and "do his duty by it," he considered that his primary duty as an artist was to work at his art. Then he added, with one of those smiles which meant so much to his friends, that perhaps the best he could now do for the Academy and its members was by his example.

As regards painting, 1891 was spent in much the same way as its predecessor had been. Towards the end of April, however, he was at Carnoustie with his family for a fortnight (when he painted several shore-pieces), and in the early summer he spent some time at Broughty-Ferry, where he stayed with the Orchars and painted the three cabinet portraits of the children of Mr. W. Stephen, which were shown at the Academy the following spring. Although dated 1890-9, the big pictures, 'A Summer Day—Carnoustie' and 'Love Lightens Labour,' probably originated at Carnoustie during one or other of these visits, for the weather was lovely and sunny, and he had not been there since 1886. At home he painted a number of landscapes about his own doors and worked in the studio at several large pictures. If none of the former was very important, the latter included the preliminary stages of the big

¹ McTaggart never missed an R.S.A. Exhibition between 1855 and 1895. During these forty years he showed 190 pictures, of which 71 or 72 were portraits and 19 were water-colours. All the water-colours were exhibited after 1875. At the R.S.A. special Exhibitions he had three pictures in 1863, five in 1880, and one in 1887; but, with two exceptions, these had been seen in preceding Exhibitions. After 1895 he exhibited only three times. In 1903 and in 1904 he sent one picture; but in 1910 (the jubilee of his election as Associate) he had two oils and one water-colour. Finally, in 1911, after his death, he was represented at the Academy by two oil pictures and one water-colour.



MOSS ROSES

'Emigrants' and the important fishing subject, 'Dawn at Sea—Home-wards.' A spirited sketch made at Carnoustie about 1874 was the germ of the latter, but the picture itself was purely a studio work. Into it, however, he poured the observation of a lifetime, and, painted at white heat in a very few days, it has all the passion and intensity of immediate visual inspiration.

The late autumn was chequered by family joy and sorrow. The birth of a daughter in October was followed a month later by news of the loss at sea of his sailor son, Willie, and during the next few months little painting was done.

About this time he was much interested in Mr. Pinnington's projected biography of Chalmers. Writing to Pettie, he tells him, "Edw. Pinnington is going to write a life of G. P. Chalmers, our old friend, and somehow it seems to give me great pleasure. I think he will make a good job of it—many of his old friends have spoken about doing it. But no result as yet, and I think it is time it was done." Throughout the whole progress of that elaborate work, McTaggart, who had previously helped Mr. Pinnington in the preparation of the series of interesting papers upon the Royal Scottish Academy and its reform, which he had written for the *Glasgow Herald* in 1889, gave the author the greatest assistance. He obtained Chalmers's letters from his correspondents, supplied reminiscences and made many suggestions.

In 1892 McTaggart made an alteration in his routine, which before long had an important bearing upon his art. Hitherto he had usually gone from home in August and September. This year he decided to go to Machrihanish for June, and, although family reasons prevented him making the long journey to Kintyre in either of the two following summers, what he saw there at this time took him back in 1895 and almost every succeeding June until the end. That arrangement had also the advantage that, with July intervening, in which to look over or to rest after the labours of the preceding month, he was fresh to start upon the pictures of harvest-field or wooded countryside which now engaged his attention during the autumn.

June on the wild and treeless west coast of Kintyre has a beauty and a character all its own. Other seasons have their fascinations—softly veiled, rich and glowing, splendid and serene, gay, melancholy, austere or

stormy. But in June, the day skies, whether cloudy or clear, are more luminous and shining, the twilights are longer and more lambent, and the wide ocean, if no more crystalline, flashes more brightly and is coloured more wonderfully than at any other time of the year. The sea-pinks nodding and the yellow lichens clinging to the grey or bronze shore-rocks, the wild thyme, which flushes with purple, and the daisies and buttercups, which spangle with white and gold the fresh green turf beside the bright sea-sands or the pearly-grey shingle beaches, are also most vivid and jewel-like then. Brilliant in lighting and fresh and ringing in colour, the beauty of June on the Atlantic shore is unveiled and virginal, yet, touched with the sense of quick young life as it is, pervaded by a noble austerity. There is nothing quite like it anywhere. It was the light and colour and life of that wonderful month in the west that in "clear dream and solemn vision" McTaggart was hereafter to paint at Machrihanish.

That first June was not particularly fine, but it had its beautiful days, and McTaggart painted several charming things, such as 'Breezy June, Cauldrons Bay,' seen from the green slopes about it, 'At Machrihanish—In Bay Voyach,' with its very lovely blue sea and delightful children playing in the shallows, 'Looking towards Jura in a Northerly Breeze,' and, I fancy, the exquisite grey and silver 'Rainy Day.' These pictures in their enhanced brilliance of lighting, greater purity of colour and increased freedom of handling foreshadowed, if anything so bright can be associated with shadow, the work he was to do at Machrihanish from 1895 onward.

Before going down he had painted the landscape portion of 'April Snow,' one of the most beautiful of his winter pictures, and during the autumn, in addition to several moorland scenes with figures, he completed the rich and golden 'Blythe October,' which, with his own portrait, represented him at next year's Academy.

The beginning of 1893 was clouded by the unexpected death of John Pettie, with whom the intimacy formed at the Trustees' Academy had always remained exceedingly close and warm. Despite Pettie's long residence in London and McTaggart's increasingly rare visits there, it was perhaps the most cherished of his artistic friendships, and he felt Pettie's passing deeply. They had met whenever they could,

and their correspondence, though intermittent, is marked by unfailing sympathy and understanding of one another's temperament, character and point of view. McTaggart went up to the funeral, and was never in London again. His admiration for his friend colours the letters he wrote to Mr. Martin Hardie when in 1907 that gentleman was writing his book about Pettie,—“I have got together a few of Pettie's letters up to his leaving Edinburgh: his arrival in London—they need no notes from me. They tell their own tale of a period and the man—his earnestness, his eager enthusiasm, impulsive and demanding, a portrait of himself.” . . . “What more can I say? Yes, one thing. See that you put your estimate of your distinguished uncle high enough—you cannot place it too high. I have read so many lives of painters spoiled by apologies, qualifications, etc. Don't you do it: time will justify you. It's a man's life overflowing with exuberant vitality and as honest as the day.”

Painting landscape about Broomieknowe during the summer, he did not go from home until September, when he again visited Carnoustie. As usual he found his chief inspiration about the West Haven, where on this occasion he painted one of the very best of his many fine pictures of the little harbour amongst the rocks, and in the wide sandy bay, where he painted the lovely grey twilight piece with figures, known as ‘Wet Sands, Carnoustie,’ which was to be his farewell to the shore which he had loved only less than that of his native Kintyre. For he never painted at Carnoustie again.

The year which followed was perhaps the most strenuous and fruitful in his whole career. In splendid form and always a hard worker, he seems to have worked incessantly throughout 1894, and the pictures which date from it number over thirty. Moreover, the great majority were fairly important, and nearly all show him at or near his best. They are also very varied. Beginning with the radiant ‘Winter Sunrise,’ he had painted several summer landscapes, including the wonderfully luminous ‘Carrington Mill,’ before he went from home for August, and after returning he painted five or six delightful harvest scenes. It was at Cockenzie, however, that the great bulk of the season's work was done or, at least, begun.

Except at Carnoustie, where he had been so often, and Crail, where

he had sketched in water-colour in 1881, Cockenzie was the only place on the east coast where McTaggart ever painted.¹ Different in type and character from any of his usual painting grounds, it proved highly stimulating, and the work done there possesses special characteristics. These were due in part to the place itself and in part to its situation upon the south side of the Firth of Forth. While the bald and dour-looking grey stone houses with their blue slate or red-tile roofs, which fringe the low rocky shore from the old tidal basin with its broken sea-walls to the new white concrete harbour at Port Seton, presented combinations of form and colour which were novel, the daily life of the fishing population, busy over the departure or arrival of the boats or preparations for sea, or the seaside play of the children, supplied a wealth of animated and significant incident entirely to his liking. The colour of the water also, here estuary rather than open sea, was browner and less lustrous, and of the rocks and sand along the shore darker and duller than what he had been accustomed to at Machrihanish or even at Carnoustie. Moreover, the outlook being to the north, the fall of the light was different from that customary in his pictures, and that in itself tended to give those now painted an air of their own. This combination of elements turned out, as has been said, stimulating, and during this one month his products, all of which were marked by a great virility, averaged nearly an important picture a day. Somewhat low in tone for him, and in colour deep and lustrous, with fuller chords of purple and brown and gold than he usually used, the Cockenzie series forms a distinctive and highly interesting part of his achievement.

If rather less prolific than its predecessor, 1895 was another year of great activity. Going to Machrihanish towards the middle of May, he had lovely weather throughout his six weeks' stay. Indeed, he used to say that the effects that year were perhaps the most beautiful he had ever seen. In any case the pictures then painted, of which 'Playing in the Surf,' 'Wet Sands and Stormy Seas,' 'The Sound of Jura,' and 'Northerly Breeze, Salt Pans' were the most important, are marked by a peculiarly vivid and vital beauty, and are handled with a masterly freedom he seldom surpassed. The landscapes painted at Broomieknowe during the ensuing

¹ Water colours at Lunan Bay and oil sketches at Auchmithie and one or two other fishing ports were results of one-day visits.



COCKENZIE—AFTERNOON

summer and autumn were equally notable. They included these charming riverside pieces, 'The Ford, Lothian Bridge,' 'On the Esk,' 'The Linn, Rosslyn Glen,' and 'Rosslyn Castle,' the splendidly powerful 'Harvesting, Mid-Lothian,' and the earlier of the 'Consider the Lilies' pictures, which, unlike its larger successor, was to a great extent a studio work.

It was during this summer that the big studio on the knowes in the field on the eastern side of the garden at Deanpark was built. There the ground slopes suddenly on the far side of the boundary hedge, and, with comparatively little trouble, a site was formed, which, easily accessible from the garden, yet enabled the new building to be placed so that it interfered practically not at all with the view from the house, or the old garden on the higher level. Perhaps that was as well, for the yellow brick fire-proof building is scarcely an architectural adornment to its environment. Something like a plain church hall externally, inside it was completely unadorned except by the pictures on the walls or on the easels. But thirty-five feet by twenty-five and arched by a barrel-roof, springing from the walls some eleven feet up, it was admirably adapted for the double purpose of gallery and studio, for which it was ultimately used by the artist. The lighting was nearly perfect, and fell on the walls, coloured between terra-cotta and rose, and the Turkey-carpeted floor as softly and as widely diffused as if the room had been open to the sky. It was, in fact, such a pleasant apartment that McTaggart, though he had built it primarily to have a place in which he could look at his pictures and show them to visitors (now that he had practically ceased to exhibit) under gallery conditions, came gradually to use it as a second painting room. Both studios were, however, always ready for use, and sometimes he worked in one, sometimes in the other.

Desire to complete the many pictures commenced during the two preceding years, perhaps also the attraction of the new studio, kept him at home throughout 1896, and the new pictures commenced were entirely landscapes. But the exquisite 'Cornfields,' the fine 'Harvest at Broomieknowe,' the charming 'Golden Autumn, Lothianburn,' and the lovely 'Harvest Moon at Twilight' would have made any year notable. In addition, he painted the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Mackay and of

Baillie Duncan Macdonald, which were the last commissions he accepted for work of that character.

During the early spring of 1897, McTaggart had a serious illness. A chill was followed by what the doctors diagnosed as Bright's disease, and the specialist called in told him that he would never paint out-of-doors again. But he would not believe them, and, with care and the approach of summer, he threw the symptoms off and, as we say in Scotland, "cheated the doctors." Immediately after the marriage of his eldest son in the beginning of June, he went to Machrihanish, and, taking his painting gear with him, painted two of the biggest and greatest things he ever did in the open. These were the landscapes of what became the St. Columba pictures. The magnificent storm-piece, 'A Westerly Gale,' was also painted during this visit. That, however, was done from a window in Golf Villa, where during these later years he usually lived when at Machrihanish.

Although he did not paint much outside in the ensuing autumn and winter, he was busy in the studio, and, amongst other pictures, worked at a series which he had commenced some time before to illustrate a collection of stories which his friend Orchar¹ had intended to publish. If a bye-way in the artist's work, these little pictures of humorous incident are full of Scottish character and are admirably painted.

By the beginning of 1898 he was again in full work, and the summer saw him painting a series of important and splendid canvases. It was as if he had said to himself in the words of Constable, "I can stand before a six foot canvas with a mind at ease: thank God." At least two five foot and four seven foot pictures date from that year. These are 'Amongst the Bents' (39×57), 'A Summer Day, Machrihanish' (38×57), 'Machrihanish—The Bay from Bayvoyach' (57×86), 'Machrihanish Bay' (57×86), 'The Lilies' (52×80), and 'The Soldier's Return' (53×81). And on 'Christmas Day' he painted the radiantly

¹ Subject to the life-rent of his wife, Mr. Orchar, who died in May 1898, left his collection of pictures, with a sum for endowment, to the burgh of Broughty Ferry. It is eminently representative of the work of the Scott Lauder group, and contains some eighteen or twenty fine examples of McTaggart. Several of these are amongst the most important works painted by McTaggart prior to 1880, but the later development of his style is scarcely represented at all. Mrs. Orchar died in 1916.

sunny picture which bears that name ($37 \times 55\frac{1}{2}$). Each is a real achievement, but, as they will be described later, comment is unnecessary. Here it is sufficient to say that in power and suggestiveness of handling, in purity and vibration of colour and clarity and brilliance of lighting, and in emotional significance and pictorial beauty they are a remarkable embodiment of the full maturity of his gifts.

Those which followed in the succeeding year, if scarcely so large (most of them were five footers), were equally notable pictorially, and were painted with even greater freedom and power. 'Lobster Fishers, Machrihanish Bay,' 'The Atlantic Surf,' a splendidly wavy 'Machrihanish Bay' without figures, and a second and quite different 'Lobster Fishers,' with boats beating shorewards (now in the Melbourne Gallery), were the chief of the sea pictures, as 'The Harvest Moon' and 'The Showery Harvest Day' were of the landscapes begun at this time.

After leaving Edinburgh McTaggart had exhibited very rarely, and, while pictures frequently passed from his studio into collections, either directly or through dealers, little of his more recent and most characteristic work had been seen by the public. Reluctant though he was to part with his own, he knew that pictures were painted to be seen and enjoyed, and, although averse to showing single pictures in miscellaneous exhibitions, where their novelty rather than their beauty might be emphasised, he felt that the time had come when a series of pictures representative of the aims and achievement of his maturity should be exhibited. Probably a desire to help his eldest son to start business for himself as an engineer was also an incentive.¹ After various projects had been considered, he came to an arrangement (May 1900) with Mr. P. McOmish Dott, under which that dealer, who for a good many years had been an ardent admirer and a pretty constant buyer, agreed to purchase twenty-seven (subsequently raised to twenty-nine) pictures for the sum of £5000, and to show them in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee before they were finally dispersed.

With this exhibition in prospect, McTaggart remained at home all summer and devoted himself to the completion of these pictures and to painting a few smaller ones with more important figure incidents to give variety. His own idea had been uniformity rather than variety, but on

¹ Now the well-known firm MacTaggart, Scott & Co., Ltd., Loanhead.

this detail he gave way to the dealer's more practical point of view. He would not, however, consent to a proposal that, with the intention of making his work more widely known and of increasing interest in the complete exhibition when it was held, a preliminary show of a certain number of the pictures should be given in Paris and London. His reply is so characteristic of the man and his attitude to life that, at Mr. Dott's suggestion, it is given here :

“BROOMIEKNOWE, 24 Dec. 1900.

MY DEAR DOTT,

We will begin first at Jerusalem!!! You ask why are my pictures not more valued (in commerce) when I am so satisfied with the appreciation of my countrymen—no artist's pictures bring a higher price in the open market!!! &c., &c., &c., and this without any Tourneying or Tomfoolery. To think of it would make me die of shame.

There are knights and knights. Some to their honour have given their whole *heart* and *strength* to their country's service and the good of man, not raking up and down the country boasting.

(Verbum sap.)

The second part of your letter will receive (as it deserves) my best attention!!! The suggestions are all good.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and many o' them,

I am, Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM McTAGGART.

Seen first in Glasgow, then in Edinburgh, and finally in Dundee during the spring and early summer of 1901, the collection was not only, as the catalogue¹ claimed, a fair and adequate illustration of what was best in McTaggart's lifework prior to that date, but came upon the public “with a good deal of the force of a revelation and with all the freshness of novelty.” The papers, except *The Scotsman*, which makes a rule of ignoring all “one man shows,” however important, were generous in their praise; the art public, though some of the more conventional were

¹ With a preface by Edward Pinnington and several illustrations. The pictures shown numbered thirty-two, and of these three—‘The Storm,’ ‘Caller Oo,’ and ‘Within a Mile o' Campbeltown’ (which had been exhibited at the R.S.A. in 1881 as ‘Through the Barley’) were lent by the artist. If both the Columba pictures had been finished he would have insisted, he said, that they should be included.



THE SOUND OF JURA

somewhat startled perhaps, were genuinely appreciative; the artists, especially those of the younger generation, were enthusiastic. The result on his reputation has already been discussed, and as many of the pictures shown have either been described or will be later, nothing more need be said of this milestone in his artistic pilgrimage, except that it was less a finishing post than a point of departure for future development. Although his position as the greatest artist resident in his own country was now assured, and he felt that, as regards provision for his large family,¹ he "could not now be beaten," his artistic activity remained unabated, and the quality of his work continued to grow in subtlety, depth and expressive power.

Missing Machrihanish this year, McTaggart spent July at Carradale, where he had not been since 1885. His stay there, however, was more of a holiday than his summer changes usually were, for, while he did several water-colour drawings, he painted only two important oil pictures. These were 'Ailsa Craig from Port-an-Righ' and 'Arran Hills from Ardcarroch.'

In the autumn the studios, from which so many canvases had been removed in the spring, were once more filled with pictures, commenced during recent years, which he had now taken up again. The two 'Lobster Fishers,' painted in 1899, 'A Summer Day,' 'The Lilies' and 'Christmas Day' of 1898, and 'Wet Sands and Stormy Seas,' begun in 1895, were nearing completion; and, amongst pictures not previously mentioned, were two June landscapes, with the yellow broom in full bloom, one at least of which had been painted just before he went to Carradale.

If 1902 was also comparatively barren in new projects, the two most important things then painted rank amongst his greatest works. Perhaps one might even say that with them his art reached its high water-mark. Founded upon 'The Sound of Jura' (1895), but without figures, the spacious and splendid 'Paps of Jura' (56 × 82), although executed in the studio, is as atmospheric in effect and colour and as vital and spontaneous in handling as the magnificent 'Choral Waters' (48 × 72), which was

¹ His youngest child, a boy, was born in 1900. In addition to two or three children who did not survive infancy, he had twelve children, and was survived by ten. Of these two sons and two daughters were of his first family and two sons and four daughters of his second.

painted entirely in the open at Machrihanish in June, when he also painted a few minor but very delightful canvases. On the other hand, during 1903 and 1904 there was a recrudescence of out-of-doors activity. For the most part these were years of smaller canvases, but almost everything done was marked by extraordinary vitality of conception and execution. Flooded with ambient light, exquisite or powerful in colour, magical in suggestion of movement, composed with exceptional felicity and painted with the greatest subtilty, in them and a few landscapes painted during the following year and in the three or four pictures done in 1907 (after which he painted comparatively little) McTaggart remained at the height of his powers.

The largest sea-piece of 1903 was 'Off-Shore Wind, Cauldrons' (39 × 58), a very brilliant rendering of sunshine with a clear sky and an off-shore wind, but quite as beautiful in their respective ways were the more exquisite 'Sun on the Sea' and 'Summer Sunlight,' and the more lively 'A June Day—Crab Catching' and 'Near the Moil.' Next June his work at Machrihanish was no less remarkable. In 'The White Surf' (42½ × 63), into which figures were introduced a few years later, he achieved one of his finest successes as a painter of storm, and in 'Whaur the Burnie rins doon to the Sea,' 'A Shingly Shore,' 'The White Sand Hills,' 'The Race of the Tide,' and 'Broken Weather changing to Fine,' to name no more, he attained very wonderful effects of light, colour, and atmosphere by an economy of means and a subtilty of handling greater even than he had hitherto used. Steeped in mellow sunshine, the big 'Farm Yard' (56 × 86) finished that season's work.

Not leaving home in 1905, the chief new pictures painted by him then were landscapes. A brilliant improvisation 'The Wind on the Heath,' done about mid-summer, was followed at harvest time by the sparkling 'Barley-field, Sandy Dean,' by the exquisite if very slight 'Autumn Evening,' and by 'September's Silver and Gold,' the last perhaps the most subtle and magical of all his landscapes.

Little painting was done during the succeeding year. All through the spring and early summer the illness of his fourth surviving son, Hamish, kept him anxious, and even after its fatal termination, when he went to Rosehill on Campbeltown Loch for a change, he could not settle to work. Besides, he was already pledged to so many projects that in

self-defence, as he put it, he had now almost to close his eyes to new beauties. Yet he felt glad to be amongst the familiar scenes without working. To look at them without seeking to realise them was something of a novelty; and he was glad of the rest. At the same time, he was always alert, and that he was constantly noting the nicest variations of effect, in their minuteness as well as in their breadth, was evident from his conversation. For well-nigh fifty years, as his pictures bear witness, he had been a devotee of nature and a keen student of her endless variety, and yet, as we stood one day beside a rippling blue sea, on whose horizon's brim Ailsa Craig hung like a cloud—an effect he had painted a score of times perhaps—he said that the truth of the saying about gathering pebbles on the shore while the sea of knowledge lay beyond often came to him with irresistible force. The district was full of memories, and he was in reminiscent mood. He did not know whether these thoughts were a help or a hindrance, and did not think it wise to decide; but from the early days they were of friends who had gone to America, and now they were often of those who were dead. He recalled many of his early impressions of nature also, and spoke specially of his first sight as a boy—and it was as clear as if he had seen it yesterday—of Campbeltown Loch and Kilbrannan Sound, seen from the hills to the south of his old home, with the fishing fleet going out.

Resuming his usual habits in the autumn, he brought some of the projects of which he had spoken nearer completion, and, at Machrihanish in June 1907, he painted three or four pictures which in freshness, energy and living beauty stand near the very top of his achievement. But 'Cauldrons Bay' (26 × 40), 'Atlantic Surf' (40 × 61), 'The Summer Sea' (40 × 61), and 'Mist and Rain, Machrihanish' (40 × 72) were the last important pictures painted by him there. Although he continued to work pretty constantly at home during 1908, and even started one or two pictures of considerable size, he was now little inclined to undertake the labour involved in painting large canvases in the open, and in June, when he paid what was to be his last visit to Machrihanish, he painted (except for a large sketch of a sunset) only in water-colours. These drawings, as I have already indicated, probably excelled anything he had ever done in that medium in subtle power of selection, exquisiteness of colour, aerial effect, and vital suggestiveness of handling.

Meanwhile his reputation, already great, was still expanding. An exhibition of pictures and drawings by him at Mr. Alexander Reid's gallery in Glasgow in 1906, followed a year later by a show of some thirty of his most recent pictures at Messrs. Dott's in Edinburgh, had increased the circle of his admirers ; and the fourteen oils and four water-colours, which showed his art in nearly all its phases, formed perhaps the most outstanding and memorable feature in the remarkable collection illustrative of his country's achievement in the arts, which was brought together at the Scottish National Exhibition in 1908. Even in London his work was beginning to be known and appreciated. A good many artists and critics were much interested by loan pictures exhibited at the New English Art Club in 1900 and 1909, and at the International Society in 1901 ; and thereafter it was pretty generally acknowledged that, if as yet little known outside Scotland, he was a force to be reckoned with and occupied a distinctive place in modern painting. It was, however, to the admirable series of loan collections organised at the Whitechapel Art Gallery by Mr. Charles Aitken that London was chiefly indebted for its acquaintance with McTaggart's art. There between 1902 and 1912 seventeen representative pictures and drawings were shown, and nearly always there was a note in the catalogue appreciative of his aims and explanatory of the place a particular picture occupied in his development.

Throughout the winter 1908-9 McTaggart was regularly in his studio ; but his energy seemed less, and he did not paint much. He was as cheery and bright as ever ; but his friends noticed with regret that he, who had for so long preserved the spring and spirit of youth, was visibly ageing. Early in the spring it was thought desirable that he should consult a doctor, and examination revealed the presence of a tumour. It was not considered of a malignant nature, however, and no immediate trouble was anticipated. In June he once more revisited Carnoustie, but made only two slight water-colour sketches. Yet the change seemed to do him good, and, at the usual dinner he gave to the Council of the Society of Scottish artists in July, he was in excellent spirits. Preparations for the marriage of his third daughter, Mysie, and Mr. C. M. Penman had also been a source of interest ; and, just on the eve of that wedding, his eldest daughter Annie, to whose devotion and sympathetic understanding his happiness had owed much, and the



SEPTEMBER'S SILVER AND GOLD

writer of this biography, who had been for many years on the most intimate terms with him and his family, became engaged. These two weddings, the one about the middle of July, the other early in October, took place in the big studio, and brought together many of his old friends. Later in the year the jubilee of his election as Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy issued, if not in a complete reconciliation, still in a kindlier understanding with that body. Expressed in most felicitous terms and as true as it was complimentary, the letter of congratulation sent to him by the Academy reads :

ROYAL SCOTTISH ACADEMY,
EDINBURGH, 10th Decr., 1909.

DEAR SIR,

At a recent meeting, the attention of the President and Council was called, by one of the members, to the fact that it was fifty years on the 9th November since two of their brother Academicians were elected Associates. This, which would be a notable event in any body, and whatever the standing of the members therein, is especially so in an Academy of Art where membership implies an already high attainment and when the career has been so distinguished as in the case of yourself and Mr. Cameron.

The President and Council feel sure that they express the opinion of all their colleagues of the Academy in congratulating you on so long and interesting an association with a body to which your achievements have brought an added distinction, and in wishing you many years of health to enjoy the well merited position to which you have attained ; a position long accorded in your own country and now recognised by many beyond its borders.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

WM. D. MCKAY,
Secretary.

Wm. McTaggart, Esq., R.S.A.

McTaggart's reply was characteristically brief, and, like his pictures, implied more than was said. Its keynote was the human associations he had enjoyed and not the distinctions he had won.

"My dear Secretary," he wrote, "I have been gratified to receive your intimation, from the President and members of the Academy, of the fact that 50 years have passed since Mr. Cameron and I were elected to the rank of Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy.

It brings back old times and some old thoughts since I received D. O. Hill's letter in 1859.

Hugh Cameron and I are reminded of our long continued blessing of life—a perfect jubilee.

I am,

Yours aye,

WILLIAM McTAGGART.

To all who loved him the months which followed were full of anxiety. Almost imperceptibly, but none the less surely, his strength was failing. He went down to the studio less frequently, and then rather to dream than to paint. For many years he had made a point of never working upon a picture unless he felt certain that he could improve it. Now he said with his twinkling smile "I hope that I won't be left to make a fool of myself in my old age." He was more silent also, and instead of leading the conversation, as he had usually done, had sometimes to be kept in it. Yet no word of complaint passed his lips, and every now and then he would flash into his old eager brilliancy. Although he had not been in Edinburgh all winter, he went in specially (4th March) to see the Academy exhibition, where by request of the Council, and in celebration of his jubilee as a member, he was once more represented. The pictures chosen were his own portrait painted in 1892, 'The Young Fishers' of 1876, and 'Sunset,' a water-colour done at Machrihanish during one of his earlier visits.¹ By a curious coincidence his first Academy exhibition had been that of 1855, when the galleries were used for the first time, and this, which was his last, was also the last held in the rooms where he had shown so many fine works. More curious still, he met there his old fellow-student, Mr. Hugh Cameron, who had been elected Associate on the same day as he had been, and his old friends, Mr. William Leiper, R.S.A., and Mr. Robert Alexander, R.S.A., also happened to be in the galleries. This unexpected meeting was a great pleasure to all.

The end was now near. About the middle of March he took to his bed, and after lying in a half-conscious state for nearly a fortnight, on

¹ At the 1911 Royal Scottish Academy Exhibition in the new galleries 'The Preaching of St. Columba,' 'Midsummer Noon,' and the water-colour 'Ossian's Grave' were shown.

Saturday, 2nd April 1910, at about half-past two in the afternoon, he slipped quietly away. Three days later in Newington Cemetery, Edinburgh, amidst a great concourse of sorrowing friends and artists, all that was mortal of William McTaggart was committed to the keeping of the earth which he had loved so well, and the beauty and wonder of which he had painted with so much poetry, knowledge and power.

Devoted to his art ; free alike from the petty animosities, which spring from jealousy of other artists, and the small but sore heart-burnings, which are the nemesis of social ambition ; peculiarly fortunate in the warmth of its friendships and in the felicity of its domestic relationships, McTaggart's life, while it had its struggles and trials and triumphs, was not what is called eventful. But, if devoid of the dramatic light and shade which chequers the careers of some great artists with alternating bursts of glory and of gloom, it was eminently happy and it was singularly complete. He had drunk of life to the full, and he left behind him, to those who knew him, the memory of a good and great man, and, to the world, a long series of pictures passionate with life and glowing with light and beauty.