

# WILLIAM McTAGGART

R.S.A., V.P.R.S.W.

*A Biography and an Appreciation*

BY

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William M. Taggart

## PREFACE

To those who knew William McTaggart or admire his art, this biography and appreciation will require no apology, except it be for the manner in which it has been carried out. It was my privilege to have lived upon terms of the closest intimacy with him for the last twenty years of his life, to have heard him speak of his past, to have watched him at work, to have seen and studied most of his pictures ; and, since his death, not a few of his friends and admirers have suggested that it was a duty incumbent upon me to make a record of what I knew. To be quite frank, however, little urging was required. As a student of the development of modern painting and an occasional writer upon art, I felt that, whatever I might make of them, McTaggart and his achievement offered an unusually fascinating theme. For in the orderly, yet impassioned, growth of his conceptions and style, the whole evolution of pictorial art from pre-Raphaelitism to impressionism is epitomised.

To explain the affection and admiration in which McTaggart was held, as man and artist, by his intimates and artistic contemporaries, to those who have only heard of him and have seen few of his pictures, is not easy ; but, whether I have succeeded in doing justice to my subject or have failed, such is the *raison d'être* of this book.

In its preparation much assistance was given by many friends, particularly perhaps by Mr. T. S. Robertson, one of McTaggart's oldest friends, and by Mr. P. McOmish Dott, both of whom read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions. The biography itself, however, is based chiefly upon the letters and papers placed at my disposal by Mrs. McTaggart.

The catalogue, which forms a very complete record of his work, was compiled to some extent from catalogues of exhibitions and sales, mention

of pictures in letters, and personal knowledge. But, as the artist did not keep even a rough list of pictures, it would have been impossible to have attained anything like completeness without the help of Mr. Proudfoot, of Messrs. Aitken Dott & Son, Mr. Alexander Reid, Mr. Muir, of Messrs. Bennett & Sons, Messrs. George Davidson, Ltd., Mr. W. L. Peacock, Mr. Percy Scott, Messrs. Doig, Wilson & Wheatley, Messrs. Connell & Sons, Mr. Alexander Duncan, of Messrs. Dowell, and Dr. A. H. Millar, of the Dundee Gallery.

Finally, I am greatly indebted to the many collectors who have supplied details of pictures or have permitted pictures in their possession to be reproduced.

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As McTaggart's design is based upon colour masses, articulated by line, rather than upon light and shade, reproduction of his pictures is unusually difficult. This is the case especially with those of his later period, for in them the full significance of adjoining passages or of the relationship of figures to landscape often depends upon differences of colour so delicate or subtle that they will not register as differences of tone. Colour process suggests itself as a possible solution of the difficulty. But, as yet, the best results obtainable by it are apt to be misleading and too often fail to represent a true colourist's gift truly. On the other hand, perhaps because its limitations are obvious, black and white does not pretend to be more than it is—illustration and not specious facsimile. Of all the monochromatic processes again, half-tone seems best fitted to convey some sense of the brilliance of tone and clarity of colour so characteristic of McTaggart's work. So, after full consideration, half-tone was chosen. Even in selecting pictures for translation into black and white, however, the possibility of obtaining fairly adequate results had to be considered, and many pictures with claims to be reproduced equal to those actually illustrated had to be omitted, not a few after being specially photographed.

The plates are arranged chronologically in Chapters II. to VII., and all those in Chapters VIII. to X., although not arranged in order of date, belong to the period, 1889-1910, discussed in these chapters.

The plates have been made by Messrs. Hislop & Day from photographs taken directly from the pictures, and, with the exception of one which appeared in *Scottish Painting*, all are new, and the great majority are of pictures never before reproduced. Most of the photographs were taken by Messrs. T. & R. Annan & Sons, who also made the photogravure frontispiece; but negatives by Mrs. McTaggart, Messrs. Drummond Young & Watson, Mr. Donald Scott and Mr. W. E. Gray were also used.

J. L. C.

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