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ROYAL SCOTTISH ACADEMY.

Second Impression: the Oil Paintings.

With the incoming of photography and the rather contemptuous dismissal of the Victorian habit of reproducing the features of our grandparents in daguerreotype it seemed as if portrait painting would soon be a thing of the past. Yet to-day the demand for portraits is greater than in any previous age. In Society's desire to be immortalised from ear to ear, from forehead to chin, fashionable artists have more commissions in hand than they can deal with for months to come. I doubt if men and women have changed physically during the last five centuries, but the attitude of both artist and sitter changes with the regularity of a cycle of fashion. Reynolds flattered his sitters, Gainsborough viewed the ladies of the Court of George III. through a romantic mist. The first aim of Romney and Hoppner was to turn out a pretty picture rather than a true portrait. The latter half of the 19th century went to the opposite extreme; the great portrait painters were then out for truth, and truth alone. To-day, the majority of sitters—and it is the women who are in the majority—prefer to live on canvas as an actuality rather than as an ideal abstraction, yet at the same time they wish to be presented with charm. Other sitters again, mainly successful business men, want a portrait that will be truthful rather than flattering, a likeness that will almost compete with the uninspired accuracy of the camera.

Famous Portraitists.

That the desire of the sitters is mirrored in the work of the artists who paint them is excellently brought out in the portraits in oils in the 99th exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy, open for the next four months in Edinburgh. The late John Sargent is represented here, Glyn Philpot, Lavery, Stanley Cursiter, Walter Sickert, Sir David Murray, Laszlo, Russell Flint, Sir James Guthrie, Fiddes Watt, and many another avowed portrait painter. The Sargent portrait of Provost Brownlee may be regarded, if we so wish, merely as a memorial picture, for it does not show the late distinguished painter at his best. A full dozen of the others, however, are shown in their most characteristic mood. The portrait of Mrs Crookshank has all the qualities of Laszlo's vivid if rather artificial brush, just as the charming Forbes-Sempill group has all the aristocratic grace for which Lavery is famous. "The Bar Parlour," to which we referred in a previous article, sums up the essence of Sickert's art, which is to present a "slice of life"—often humble and rather shady—in an impressionistic form, quivering with "atmosphere." F. C. B. Cadell is another impressionist, but in colour, as his "Nigger in White" bears witness, rather than in form. D. Forrester Wilson and W. Russell Flint, again, belong rather to the visionary and poetic order, while each, particularly Flint, in his "Pomona's Daughter," brings to his conception the added advantage of suave line and attractive colour. John Revel goes further in artistic conception, and in his open-air portrait of Mr. E. Scrymgeour, addressing the towers and roofs of Dundee, presumably on the evils of alcohol, subordinates the portrait to the domination of a single colour note that is far more in evidence than the likeness itself.