

CHAPTER VI

“THE McTAGGART PORTFOLIO”

IN the spring of 1889 Mr. Alexander Dowell, the Edinburgh auctioneer, announced that he would hold on March 23rd a sale of what was described as “The McTaggart Portfolio.” The advertisement stated, “The collection numbers about 120 pictures, and comprehends nearly all the works in water-colour that Mr. McTaggart has produced during the last thirty years (1857 to 1888). From an artistic point of view, this exhibition will possess a still wider interest, a large number of these water-colours being the original designs of the most important works from this painter’s easel which have been shown in the galleries for nearly thirty years, and many have now been so highly finished as to equal, if not excel, the pictures themselves.” Broadly speaking, this was a fairly accurate account of the scope of the collection; but while delightful water-colour versions of many of the earlier pictures, such as ‘The Builders’ (1859), ‘Going to Service’ (1862), ‘The Pleasures of Hope’ (1867), ‘Dora’ (1868), ‘Willie Baird’ (1865), ‘Enoch Arden’ (1866), and ‘The Young Trawlers’ (1869), which had laid the foundations of his reputation, were included, these were not in most cases contemporary with the oil pictures, though painted from the original studies from which the oils had been made. If not a few were highly finished, neither the handling nor the colour was of the earlier period of his art, and inscriptions upon them, like “First painted in 1870” (‘The Young Connoisseurs’), or “Painted 1871 in oil” (‘The Murmur of the Shell’), or the dates showed that it was not the artist’s intention that they should be so regarded. Their presence, however, added greatly to the variety and interest of the collection, and made it, in many ways, very fully represen-

tative of the artist's progress and achievement during the first thirty years of his career. Yet delightful though these more elaborate figure pictures were, they were surpassed in charm and brilliance by the drawings done directly from nature or primarily as water-colours. That, at least, is the impression which remains with me. In some of the former there was an occasional hotness of colour, reminiscent of his earlier time, which compared unfavourably with the clarity and purity of tint and tone in the latter, which dated from 1870 to the autumn preceding the sale. On view for five days before the dispersal, the exhibition attracted great attention and evoked widespread admiration amongst artists and lovers of art; while the sale itself surpassed expectation. Many of the drawings have since changed hands at greatly enhanced prices, but a total of well over £4000 for a series of water-colours by a living artist was unprecedented in Scotland.

A notice of the collection, which appeared in *The Scottish Leader*, is of much interest as recording the impression made by it at the time upon a sympathetic and sensitive observer. Too long to quote in full, the annexed passages show its general drift and conclusions:

"It has seldom, or never, happened in the history of art in Scotland that two such important sales of pictures, composed of the work of a single artist, have occurred in Edinburgh within a fortnight of each other as the Wingate sale, which took place in Mr. Dowell's a week ago, and the McTaggart sale, which is to take place next Saturday in the same place. . . . In referring to the works of Wingate at the time they were on view, we indicated that the foundation of his art and of its ultimate power was laid in the very detailed, elaborate and patient handling of his early period; and the same remark applies, with at least equal force, to the art of Mr. McTaggart. . . . His early work generally is finished with a precision and firmness of touch, a searching rendering of detail, which one can hardly parallel but by a reference to early Flemish painting, to a panel by Hans Memling, or a panel by John Van Eyck. But since the point marked by such a work as the oil picture, 'The Thorn in the Foot' (1859), Mr. McTaggart's art has travelled far indeed; not by changing its aim—its aim always has been and still is to set on canvas or on paper the appearances of nature—but rather in compliance with the new—the subtler and larger—facts of nature of which, by prolonged

study, the artist has gradually become conscious, and which for their adequate artistic expression have demanded a gradual change of style. His handling has become broader, because he is now most perceptive of the broad relations of nature, instead of, as formerly, concerning himself mainly with her individual details and isolated parts. In his art, as elsewhere, the inevitable law has had its operation, and the man who was faithful in the small things of the landscape has now become lord over the many things which make up the related whole of its infinity. That this change in the painter's manner—that this change in his mode of regarding nature, which underlies that manner, and of which that manner is simply the inevitable expression—is a sure and absolute gain we will hardly venture to assert. Absolute gain, with no touch of counter-balancing loss at all, is rare indeed in this world. There was an exquisite charm in the precision of Mr. McTaggart's earlier manner; his early pictures had touches of finished grace and dignity in the contours and poses of certain of their figures, of which his present-day art shows no trace. . . . Yet we can very unhesitatingly say that his change of style has been progressive development, not decadence; that his art is infinitely more accomplished than it was twenty years ago; that he is now pre-eminent among Scottish landscapists as a painter of atmosphere and a painter of sunlight. The present collection, numbering over 130 works, are entirely water-colours, and are all of them quite considerable in size. They may be said to represent every variety of subject which the painter has been accustomed to treat in that medium: for his portraiture, strictly so called, has always been done in oils. . . . It is satisfactory to know that, on account of the importance of the collection, this fine series of drawings from “The McTaggart Portfolio” will be on view to the public in Mr. Dowell's gallery, into which they seem to have introduced so much unwonted light and sunshine, during the whole of the present week, up till the morning of the sale.”

Letters between McTaggart and Mr. T. S. Robertson, of Dundee, give a good idea of how the result was regarded by the artist and his admirers, and incidentally throw an interesting sidelight upon the previous attitude of the public towards his work. Writing on Monday, March 25th, two days after the sale, Mr. Robertson said: “You gave me on Saturday a reminiscence of sixteen years ago, and I now remember

that your determination then to reveal the beautiful in your own peculiar way brought upon you adverse criticism from many quarters of a flippant and unfair kind. And, like a man, you heeded it not, but went on as had been determined. Saturday's sale shows that you were right, and that much of the ignorance which then prevailed respecting true art has been dispelled." To this McTaggart replied: "Many thanks for your very kind letter. I was quite satisfied with the result of the sale—I would have been satisfied with a good deal less. What did me most good was to hear from several quarters how the Dundee men wired in for the pictures. I would not like to have to do without their appreciation—they are my oldest friends." And a few days later, he wrote to Mr. W. B. Chamberlin, of Brighton: "I am sorry you did not see the show. I was vain enough to wish them to be seen together. They fairly represented the work of 'this boy's' lifetime—so far—whether good or otherwise, up till now."

While it would be tedious to deal with the sale collection in detail, its exhibition afforded an exceptional opportunity for gauging the special characteristics of McTaggart's work in water-colour, and the impressions then received may be said to form the basis of my own estimate of this phase of his achievement. Since then, however, it has been my privilege to see many more drawings, including the extensive series in his portfolio at the time of his death and now divided among his children. The great majority of these have never been exhibited, not a few date earlier than any sold in 1889, and a considerable number were painted later. So, as their inclusion, or rather the conclusions drawn from study of them, would give greater completeness to the analysis we are about to make, they also will come under consideration here. In this way this chapter will be a survey of his whole work in water-colour.

Prior to 1870 water-colour was used by McTaggart as an auxiliary to oil rather than for its own sake.¹ That is to say that, while he made many sketches and notes in the medium, he seldom used it for work

¹ It is possible that friendship with Sam Bough (1822-1878) had something to do with the increasing and independent use McTaggart subsequently made of water-colour. Much of Bough's most successful work was done in that medium, and his example may have stimulated McTaggart to test its possibilities as a means of expression for his own special feelings.



SUNRISE—BAIT GATHERERS RETURNING

independent, important or distinctive in itself. Some of the slighter drawings in his earlier sketch-books are indeed beautiful in colour and free in style, and many show innate feeling for light and atmosphere. As a rule, however, they incline to be rather negative in colour and, especially in the shadows, heavy in tone, as if the artist had been more engrossed with the tonal relationships of things than with their colour and movement. This is perhaps most marked in the larger and more elaborate drawings, which, although inferior in purity of colour, clarity of tone and charm and expressiveness of handling, are closely related to his contemporary work in oil, which they sometimes seem to emulate in fullness of tone and richness of effect. But towards 1870 a change occurred in his water-colour method, and during the next few years he used it, rather than oil, as the medium for experiment with the impressionist tendencies, which had by that time begun to show themselves definitely in his art.

The gradual transition from the detailed and precise manner of the sixties to the bolder and freer style of the middle and later seventies has already been traced in his oil pictures. In water-colour it was much more rapid. Comparison of ‘Bramble Gatherers’ (1867) or ‘Storm, Machrihanish’ (1870), with ‘Sunny Summer Showers’ (1872), ‘The Bathers’ (1873) or ‘Crossing the Ford’ (1875) reveals a remarkable advance, particularly noticeable in handling and tone, for, of course, the underlying conception remained much the same. The careful and somewhat dry precision of touch in the early drawings gave place in the later to charming suavity and breadth of handling, while the tone, relieved of its substratum of darkish brown, and with the soft white of the paper gleaming through the transparent washes, assumes subtle atmospheric bloom, and emulates the infinite variety and gradation of nature’s colouring. It was, as it were, as if the idea, implicit in the chrysalis of his earlier style, had suddenly found wings to soar into the sunshine. If in purity and delicate vibration of high-pitched colour and in the suggestion of movement, he had still a considerable distance to travel before he reached his limit, ‘Sunny Summer Showers’ and other drawings of the same time, or very little later, painted chiefly on the shore or in the dell at Carnoustie during Easter holidays, are achievements which, delightful in kind, mark the attainment of complete mastery. In selection

of the essentials in impression, in the suggestion of the ambient atmosphere and the play of softly spread sunshine, in happy relationship between figure-incident and landscape, in the consummate way in which the broad washes are laid and modulated and the accents are touched in these drawings have never been surpassed. They are 'not only exquisite renderings of beautiful scenes and subjects happily designed, but possess the heightened beauty which comes from a medium used with the most refined appreciation of its special qualities.

During the summers 1876 to 1878 at Machrihanish McTaggart painted many water-colours. They were the first seasons spent right on the shores of the Atlantic, and resulted in a succession of drawings in which fuller and more vivid expression was given to his personal perception of the more elusive and transient qualities in nature than he had yet attained in oils. The lovely 'Machrihanish' (1876), looking from the bathing rock, the well-known 'Westerly Breeze,' with the scudding boats, 'Twixt the Barley and the Beans' (1877), a delightful landscape full of delicate aerial colouring, and 'Near the Mull of Cantyre' (R.S.A. 1879), where the blue water dashes into white upon the shingly shore and the sun-irradiated spindrift floats before the wind, may be named as typical. A series of sunsets of great beauty gave further variety. Softly luminous in gentle effulgence, rich and glowing in widespread splendour, or veiled and mysterious in the gathering dusk, they breathe the very spirit of sunset over the western sea. In 1879 and 1880 again other fine water-colours, including the exquisite 'Past Work,' the delightful 'Among the Bent,' in the Orchar collection—one of the slightest but most lovely things he ever did—and the vividly fresh 'Wind that Shakes the Barley' were done at Glenramskill and Kilkerran. Carnoustie also continued to furnish many excellent subjects, both landscape and marine.

In the drawings of this period one notes, with no decrease in delicacy of tone, an increase in brilliance of colour, which now, more broken in texture and sharper struck in tint, becomes richer and more vibrating within the dominating harmony wrought by a pervading atmospheric effect. The sense of movement and of the play of light have likewise quickened and are more subtly expressed, and an inclination, accentuated later, towards more animated and changeful effects makes itself felt more and more. Moreover, as previously indicated, his now mature practice

in water-colour, with its significant abstraction, its swift expressive touch and fluent manner, and its lightness and brilliance of effect, was exercising a considerable influence upon his work in oil paint.

The following decade saw him even more taken up with water-colour and handling it with even greater finesse, breadth and power. Previous to 1878 he had exhibited only half-a-dozen water-colours, but from then onwards scarcely a year passed without his showing several, principally at the exhibition of the Scottish Water-Colour Society, which was founded in that year and of which he was vice-president.

At Crail, where he spent two months in 1881, only water-colours were painted. For the most part these dealt with the quaint old town and its essential life, centred in the weather-worn and mellow-coloured little harbour, which turns its back to the North Sea and opens to the west; but the flat and rather austere landscape, to the windy edge of which the houses, crowned by the church steeple, cling, also attracted him. Still, when one thinks of his Crail work, it is such drawings as the wonderful little ‘In the Equinoctial Gales,’ with its group of anxious and wind-blown women and children watching the boats battle their way in through the smoking seas,¹ the ‘Early Morning, Crail,’ where the breezy water flashes in the unsullied sunshine with an extraordinary radiance, or ‘A Tale of the Sea,’ told on the quay by an old fisherman to enthralled children in the quiet light of a windless forenoon, that one remembers best. Like the majority of the drawings done at Crail, those mentioned were only quarter-sheet in size.

Early in the eighties McTaggart began to produce a number of drawings larger than the half-sheets he usually painted. Unlike a good many water-colour painters, however, he seems never to have been tempted to enlarge them to a size where water-colour begins to lose much of its charm through having to be forced to a strength incompatible with its inherent qualities. Perhaps he was saved from this by the fact that he could always turn to oils when he wished to paint a subject which demanded a bigger scale, fuller and deeper tones, stronger contrasts and more powerful handling than water-colour is easily capable of; but more probably his practice was determined by an innate sense of the fitness of

¹This motive was repeated twice in oils a good many years later, but each of these differs from the other and from the water-colour in design, lighting, colour and handling.

things. In any case he never used water-colour for effects more easily compassed in oil. His largest drawings never exceed an ordinary sheet of Whatman paper in size, and are always handled in a way which brings out the finest qualities of the medium. They possess that lightness of touch, that soft brilliance of lighting and that bloom and transparency of colour which are its great and distinctive fascination.

While the earliest of these more important drawings were perhaps the brilliant and beautiful 'Summer Breezes' and the forcible and dramatic 'Waiting for the Boats,' both sea-pieces probably painted at Machrihanish in 1880, two or three of the finest were burnside landscapes painted at Carnoustie a few years later. Elsewhere comment has been made upon his subtle and powerful rendering of the colour, liquidity and movement of the sea; but these and other drawings, and certain oil pictures of a somewhat similar character, mostly painted later, reveal a no less notable power of abstracting and suggesting in pictorial terms, the special characteristics and charms of inland streams. Figures of unusual importance are associated with the landscape in 'The Blackbird's Nest' (1885). The burn, running towards us, lies, transparent and limpid, in a golden-brown pool, through which the bottom shows in subtle changes of colour, and right in front, almost knee-deep in the softly gliding water, a boy stands showing a child, carried on his back, a nest in a bush which grows on the high green bank over which a strip of pale sky is seen. It is early spring before the young leaves have thrown their delicate green gossamer mantle over the trees, and a certain cool sharpness of colour and diffused clearness of light suggest not only the season but the very time and kind of day. The same is even truer of 'Whins in Bloom' (1881). Here, however, the keynote is brilliance. Everything is suffused in the glad bright radiance of morning sunshine. It fills the ineffably bright but subtly graded sky, dances upon the merry children by the burnside or wading in the swift-rippling and many-coloured stream as it babbles over its pebbled bed, sweeps broadly across the gold whin-dotted braes, which rise on the other side, and glitters and flashes upon the glimpse of not far-distant sea. Lovely in colour as well as brilliant in light, it is one of the gayest and gladdest and most sunshiny pictures ever painted. Yet, if in effect and colour less brilliant, 'Whar the Burnie rins into the Sea' (1883) is even more magical in its subtle suggestion of



WHINS IN BLOOM

sunlight and in the beauty of its delicately woven colour scheme. On the very verge of the links the burn takes a last bend before debouching upon the shore. A wonderfully blended and liquid green-bronze, it glides smoothly, over the stones in its sandy bed, onward past the tussocks of scanty grey-green bent grass on its farther bank, where, blooming like flowers, some children nestle in the sunshine. Then turning across the beach, where grey shingle and golden brown sand mingle in a soft tawny harmony, it joins the sea, which, breaking in a high rolling white surge along the ebb-tide sands, lies gleaming beneath the sunny sky, whence a soft radiance falls upon the whole scene.

At Carradale during the summer of 1883, and again two seasons later, in addition to many pictures, he painted quite a number of water-colours, which partake of the qualities already described as characteristic of the work then done in oils. Like the pictures, they deal chiefly with aspects of fisher-life, and are painted with all the sense of movement, with all the *élan* and brilliance of handling and colour, and with even more of the fine selective faculty shown in the other medium. Ranging from the ethereal exquisiteness of ‘Kilbrannan Sound from Ossian’s Grave’ (R.S.A. 1911), with its delicate blending of pale golds and tender blues and purples, to the triumphant strength of the very same prospect in ‘Kilbrannan Sound’ (S.S.A. 1910), where brown, orange, yellow and blue are used at their fullest intensity; from the hot sun-steeped golden stillness of ‘Where the Burnie runs’ (R.S.W. 1906) to the dramatic conception and movement and sober colouration of ‘After the Storm—Return of the Missing Boats,’ this series of drawings is also very varied in mood. The water-colours painted in Iona and near Campbeltown during the intervening year (1884), while different in subject matter, are naturally akin to the Carradale drawings in style. His stay in Iona was brief, but the two months spent at Glenramskill—at the farm up the glen in August and at the cottage by the lochside in September—resulted in a series of great freshness and beauty. Never going far afield for subjects, he had easily accessible from the farm the upper and wilder reaches of the glen amongst the hills, and the old Lee’ard-side road, which takes its unfenced and rough way over the slopes towards the sea and commands fine views of the Arran hills beyond the widespread Sound below, was also quite near. While these were chiefly the themes of the first month’s

work, the lower and wooded part of the glen and the shores of the loch, with distant views of Campbeltown and glimpses of the fishing-fleet, occupied the second. Amongst the former, one recalls with special pleasure the brilliant 'Up the Burn,' with its eager boy anglers beside the stony stream, and the wonderfully graded blue sun-lit sky, which, flecked with bright clouds, peeps over the dark dip between the hills into which the narrowing glen turns. Amongst the latter, the tranquil 'Piper's Cave' (R.S.W. 1909), where placid sunshine, falling from a quiet sky upon windless hillside and unrippled water and spreading gently over the warm dusty lochside road, where a round of children are at play, evokes a soothing sense of calm serenity. It was while staying there that he also painted the important water-colour—either that sold in 1889 or the one still at Broomieknowe—of 'The Young Trawlers,' which was perhaps the beginning of the series of water-colour versions of earlier oil pictures ultimately included in the sale collection. In either case, with its crowd of charming youngsters, gem-like purity of colour and deft handling, this is one of the most delightful of his figure subjects.

Until 1885 McTaggart went regularly to Carnoustie for a fortnight's painting about the end of April, but after that he was only an occasional visitor. These brief holidays had been rich in results, particularly in water-colour. Many fine drawings, tingling and alive with the spirit of spring or of

"The flow'ry May who from her green lap throws
The yellow cowslip and the pale primrose,"

were painted by the burn and on the braes in Craigmill Den ; and rarer autumn visits had varied these with exquisite renderings of sun-steeped harvest fields. No less delightful, the seaside pictures were even more varied. All times of the day and all kinds of weather appear in them. There are dawns calm and mysterious or gurdy and ominous ; quiet opalescent mornings, with sheeny dapple skies ; forenoons crisp and bright with wind and sun ; afternoons dazzlingly brilliant or sullen and stormy ; and evenings shining and serene or with cloud-filled skies shot with glistening gold and kindling rose. Some of the most beautiful are without incident, but into many, both landscapes and sea-pieces, figures are introduced—children looking for 'The Linnet's Nest' amongst whins,



IN THE EQUINOCTIAL GALES--TAKING CRAIL HARBOUR

‘Going to School’ along the sun-radiant “crook’t lane,” or waiting for ‘Faither’s Boat’ on the rocks beside the haven ; women looking for bait on the shore in ‘An East Haar,’ or ‘Dulse Gatherers’ busy at work in the glory of sunset.

With the water-colour sale (now definitely decided upon) in prospect, the sketching seasons of 1887 and 1888 were given over almost entirely to work in that medium.¹ At Tarbert, indeed, although a few new drawings were made, McTaggart was chiefly engaged upon water-colours of his earlier figure pictures. These, if following the oils pretty closely in design, were free translations rather than literal transcriptions, and possess not only different qualities, due to the change of medium and the broadening of treatment which had taken place in the intervening years, but a quite independent pictorial existence of their own. On the other hand, the drawings made at Southend were entirely new. It was his first visit there, and his work was pretty well divided between seashore and inland landscape. Of the sea-pieces none is quite so beautiful as the large drawing ‘A Summer Sea,’ which appeared in the sale collection, and amongst the landscapes none excels ‘Kildavie’ in charm. Sunshine, soft and warm rather than brilliant, suffuses the shining but delicately graded sky in the former and spreads softly gleaming over the wide expanse of faint blue sea, which breaks in gently falling white-edged waves upon the sandy shore. Very similar in mood, the other shows, from a foreground of whinny knowes, the gentle corn-filled valley of Kildavie lying between its environing hills in the calm sunshine of an autumn day. Other excellent drawings done at that time were ‘The Village Church—Autumn,’ ‘Bonny Connieglen,’ ‘Pennysearach Bay,’ and ‘Dunaverty and the Moil from Brunerican.’

Removal to Broomieknowe in 1889 brought McTaggart into constant contact with nature at all seasons of the year ; but it was in oil rather than in water-colour that the next phase of his artistic expansion was to take place. During the first year or two he painted a number of water-colours, some of which, notably perhaps several autumn scenes, are very masterly, and show his work as a water-colourist at its very best. He had, however, now attained almost all that was possible from the medium,

¹In April, 1886, during a fortnight spent at Aberfoyle, he painted a number of very vivid and powerful water-colours,

and later he used it only now and then. At the same time, the knowledge and experience acquired in its use continued to influence his work in oil, which, during the Broomieknowe period, was to combine the spontaneity and aerial qualities of the one medium with the richness, force and effectiveness of the other. Towards the close of his life, when less inclined for painting big canvases in the open, he again reverted to some extent to water-colour. The drawings done at Machrihanish in 1906 and 1908, if slighter in texture, probably excel anything of earlier date in subtle power of selection, exquisiteness of colour, delicacy of aerial effect and vital suggestiveness of handling.

Singularly direct, yet full of finesse, McTaggart's mature method in water-colour was completely free from trick, and never suggested mere dexterity. Seemingly nothing could be simpler than the way in which he employed it. Always frankly a wash, laid swimmingly with a big brush, and modulated in colour and tone as it was floated in, his actual handling was so swift and flexible, so delicate and yet so decisive, that it seems to exist only as tone, colour and atmosphere. His finest drawings have the look of having been breathed rather than painted upon the paper, and appear the result of easy, half-careless playfulness rather than what they are—the issue of finely controlled and expressive craftsmanship. The delicate bloom of the transparent and untroubled washes upon the unruffled paper is delicious in quality and sensitive suggestion, and, with his exceptional gifts for colour and for the combination of colour with atmospheric effect, he frequently produces pictorial results so abstract and so ethereal that one finds their parallel more readily in music than in painting. To quote a phrase from a verse appended by him to the title of one of his drawings, they are “aerial symphonies.” But, if an elusive beauty is the keynote of some of McTaggart's most exquisite drawings, their subtlety is never associated with weakness and their sweetness is always allied to strength. More often, however, his water-colours are marked by power tempered by tenderness, and are pregnant with the exaltation of a virile spirit rejoicing in the triumphant beauty and strength of nature, and glorying in the possession of power to give it full utterance. He who could breathe through silver so delicately, could—to reverse Browning's analogy—blow lustily through brass also, and, subtly suggestive in execution though all his water-colour



GOING TO SCHOOL

work is, many of McTaggart's drawings are as brilliant or as powerful as others are elusive and delicate. His handling of such effects is very trenchant, and is marked by a brilliant *élan* or a decisive gusto in complete harmony with the spirit in which they are conceived, while, without the least forcing of the medium or exaggeration of aerial tones, he attained wonderfully potent and rich harmonies of colour.

McTaggart's water-colours were usually painted upon double-thick rough-surface Whatman paper, which he never had mounted or strained in any way. The paper was simply placed beneath the thin iron frame attached to his sketching folio, and using a light easel, he stood to his work. His subject he drew in in charcoal always, never in pencil ; but he was content with very slight indications, and rarely if ever made an elaborate outline before painting. Even the figure incident, so happily introduced into many of his drawings, is treated in the same way. Seldom painted in on the spot, he yet usually had it in mind when sketching out of doors, and, whether a preconceived group or an incident observed at the time, he indicated its scale and placing in charcoal, and left a space of untouched paper where it was to come. Thus quite as much as in his oil pictures, the figures form an integral part of the pictorial conception, and are wedded to their setting in handling and style.

The general disposition of the design fixed, he generally began the painting by indicating the darker passages and the opposition of warm and cold colour in masses ; but the whole sketch seemed to advance at once, and no matter where he might leave off, his drawing was always complete in itself as far as it had been carried. With its fine wave drawing and its subtle suggestion of pearly light-suffused and silver-spray-dimmed atmosphere, the fascinating ‘Summer Storm, Carnoustie,’ is an admirable example of what his out-of-doors sketch was in the middle seventies, and in certain slight or unfinished drawings—such as the wonderful ‘Misty Sunshine,’ in which the sunlight seems to come and go magically through the thin sea-mist that veils the shore—painted during the last two or three years of his life, one finds, as one might have expected, that the same method of simultaneous advance, but used with still greater mastery and selective power, persisted to the end.

While, as has been indicated, McTaggart used water-colour almost invariably as transparent pigment and laid it in full-toned washes, modu-

lated while wet and seldom touched afterwards, he sometimes introduced body-colour to obtain a different quality of white from that given by the paper, with which it is sometimes contrasted. As employed by him, these touches of opaque white amalgamate admirably with the transparent ensemble of which they form a part, but even this restricted use he ultimately abandoned.¹ If occasionally obtained by wiping out, his high lights are usually the paper left untouched, and often he attained wonderful effects of sparkle by the deft swish of a well-filled brush passed so rapidly across a light that the colour only touched the raised parts of the texture. His favourite brush was an eagle sable mounted in a quill. Indeed, he never used more than one, and most of his water-colours were painted with a single brush which he had for twenty-five years, and which was "better than ever," he said, when he lost it. For, according to his own explanation, "One washed and dabbed with a water-colour brush, and did not model with it, as one frequently did when working in oils."

The abstraction or, to put it otherwise, the selection of what should appear and what be suppressed, which is so essential in water-colour, where alteration is so much more difficult to effect than in oils, was eminently congenial to McTaggart's temperament. Thinking off his paper, as it were, he only set down the result of his thought—the essence of his sensitive observation and of his poetic feeling. He enjoyed water-colour painting exceedingly, and of all his work, I imagine, he loved his water-colours best. Frequently he would take his portfolio out and arrange a series from it round his dining-room just to enjoy them himself. "There is nothing so beautiful as water-colour," he would sometimes say. "One associates freedom and charm of expression with it." And he thought that there were certain qualities of colour and atmosphere which could only be obtained by its use. Certainly in his hands the medium possessed peculiar charms. His drawings rank amongst the most beautiful things ever achieved in it, and it is difficult to recall any work in which the special qualities of water-colour are more finely and more expressively used.

¹There are in existence some five or six drawings (half-sheet) by him executed almost entirely in body-colour. All except one are on ordinary brown paper, which, left untouched here and there, is used very cleverly as part of the reticent yet rich colour schemes.