

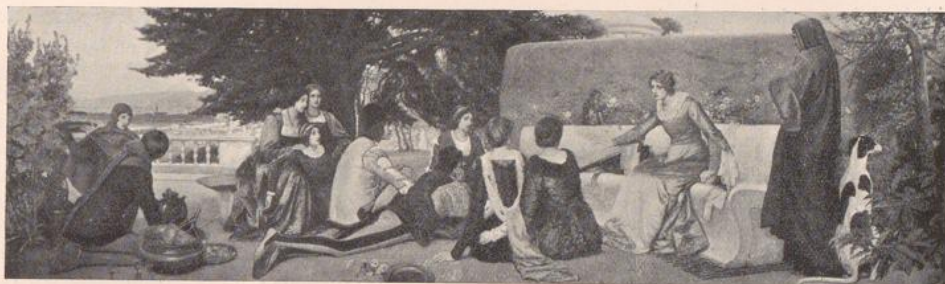


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A Decorative Painting By Sir James D. Linton.

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A Decorative Painting by Sir J. D. Linton



"BOCCACCIO; THE OPENING SCENE IN THE DECAMERONE"

BY SIR JAMES D. LINTON

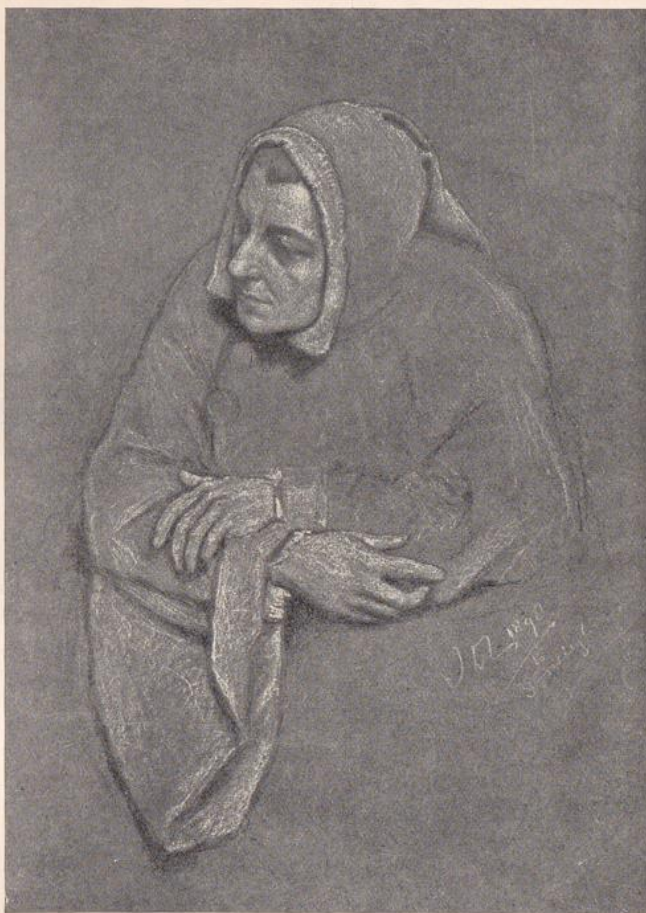
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gradually, but surely, swept away. I have myself seen excellent old woodwork thrown on the grass in a churchyard to rot or to be carted off by the villagers as firewood.

J. HENWOOD BLAMEY.

DECORATIVE
PAINTING BY
SIR JAMES D.
LINTON.

THERE is at the present time a very evident tendency in certain sections of the art world to take an unnecessarily narrow view of the possibilities and functions of decorative art. This tendency has had its origin, partly in a rather widespread misconception of the real purposes of decoration, and partly in a fashion that is based upon a wholly irrational notion that the shape and character of ornamental design have been fixed for all time by the products of certain styles and periods. The crowd that follows these ideas, with the misdirected enthusiasm that is too often the vice of the unoriginal, professes to regard idiosyncrasies and tricks of expression as being really in the nature of revelations of the greatest truths of art; and,



STUDY FOR "BOCCACCIO; THE OPENING SCENE IN THE DECAMERONE"

BY SIR JAMES D. LINTON

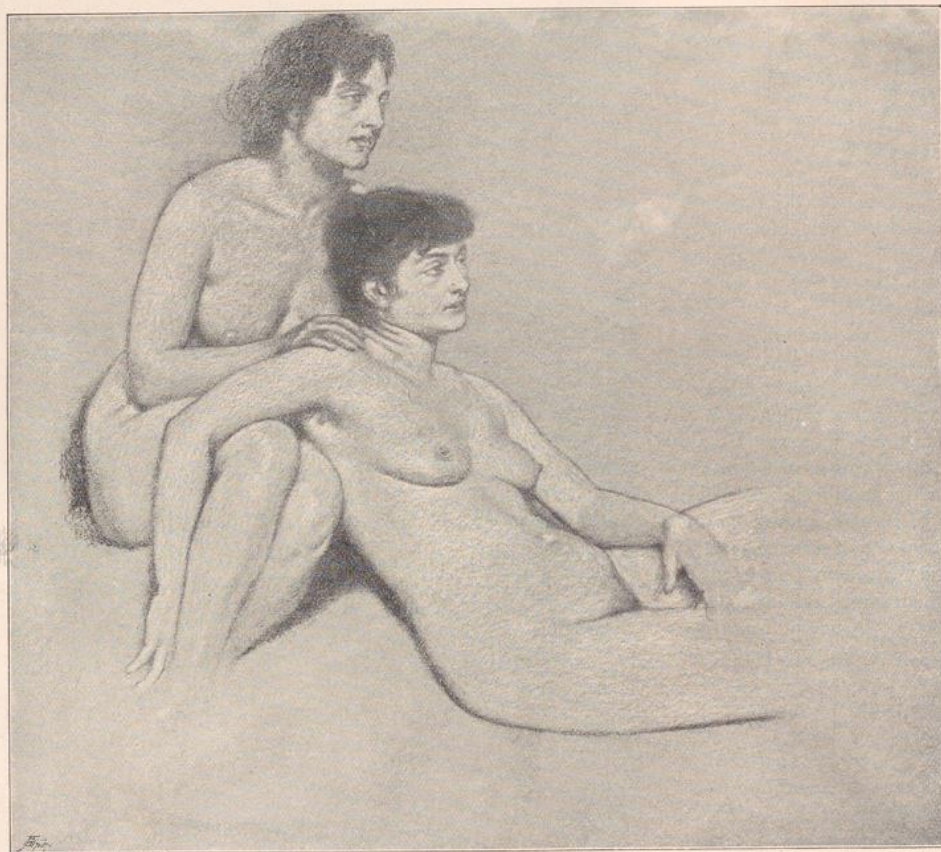
A Decorative Painting by Sir J. D. Linton

hide-bound in their conventions and general scope.

The danger that underlies this warping of great principles to suit the purposes of small groups of workers is in many ways a very serious one, for it threatens the vitality of design and checks the growth of that catholicity of taste without which no great national school can ever flourish or become actively influential. Directly decoration comes to be treated as if it were a thing that must be rigidly limited to certain lines and bound down to observe a particular set of conventions, it loses its reason for existence. Under such conditions it relapses into trickery; it becomes morbid and monotonous, or superficially pretentious; and it substitutes mere affectation for honest intention. It undergoes, in fact, all the degenerations that are inevitable when inbreeding is permitted to continue

unchecked and no new blood is introduced to counteract hereditary tendencies of an evil kind.

We have lately in this country been going through some rather curious experiences with regard to the development of decorative art, as it is understood by the painter, apart from the similar changes which are observable in the work of the decorative craftsmen. Half a century ago the practice of design had become quite extraordinarily incapable; there were no artists who could be said to understand even in a rudimentary fashion what were the essentials of decoration, and there was no work being done that had a trace of interest on artistic grounds. A few years later things began to improve slowly but surely. First one man, then another, strove to find a way out of a position that was as lamentable as it was ridiculous, and as these men gained power and collected



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substituted in their stead and general
work.

The danger that inheres in the sweeping of general
principles to suit the purposes of small groups of
students is in being left a very narrow way for it
diminishes the vitality of design and checks the
growth of that consistency of taste without which
no great national school can ever flourish or
become entirely influential. Directly decoration
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We have lately in this country been going
through some not-unpleasant experiences with regard
to the development of decorative art, as it is
understood by the masses, apart from the similar
changes which are observable in the work of the
decorative profession. Half a century ago the
practice of the profession became quite extraordinarily
isolated. There were no artists who could be
said to be working in a rudimentary fashion
and were not at all devoid of decoration, and there
were no artists who had a trace of interest
in the thing. A few years later things
began to change slowly but surely. First one
and then another began to find a way out of a
situation which was as miserable as it was ridiculous,
and the art began to gain power and collected



SKETCH FOR "BOCCACCIO: THE OPENING SCENE OF THE PROLOGUE"

BY SIR JAMES D. LINTON

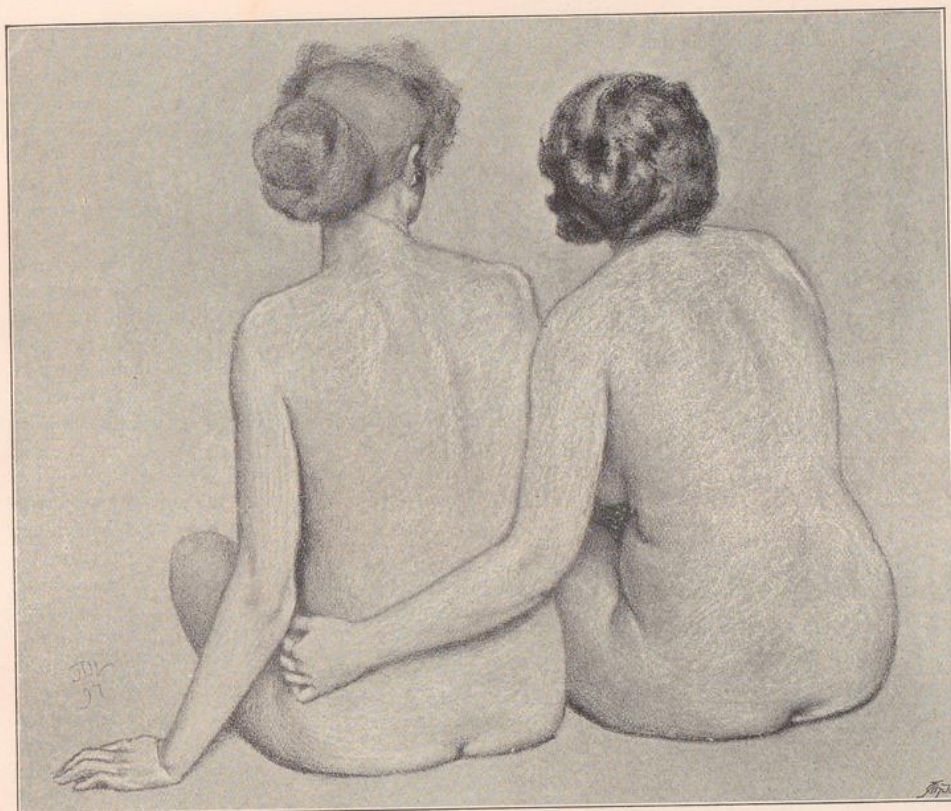
SIR JAMES D. LINTON
BY
DECORATIVE
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1870
G. G. G.



A Decorative Painting by Sir J. D. Linton



STUDY FOR "BOCCACCIO; THE OPENING SCENE IN THE DECAMERONE."

BY SIR JAMES D. LINTON

disciples, a new school of decorative painting began to form and to make its influence felt upon public taste. Down to about ten years ago this school had kept its creed fairly simple, and had retained much of its original purity of practice; but since then certain changes have been brought about that are not altogether for the better. In a good many unfortunate instances pure eccentricity has been given a free rein, and allowed more or less to dominate the works of certain painters, whose undoubted talent, if kept under a wholesome restraint, would probably have led them to achievements of a more lasting and admirable quality. Mere eccentricity is to be deprecated in every form of decorative art. The search after novelty or individuality must be essentially natural and healthy in character, and entirely free from the taint of a self-conscious straining after effect, or it

will fail completely to reach the true distinction to which it aspires.

It is especially in pictorial design that the consequences of an extravagant attitude are most unpleasantly apparent. In present-day pictures the cult of what is morbid or eccentric has gone to serious lengths, and men who have undoubtedly great capacity for better work are too ready to misdirect their energies merely for the sake of gaining the temporary approval of the unthinking. What is necessary by way of corrective is a definite assertion of the value of simplicity, a proof that fine decoration is independent of curious tricks, and that the devices of the showman are entirely out of place in art.

On this ground, such a picture as Sir J. D. Linton's *Boccaccio; the opening scene in the*

A Decorative Painting by Sir J. D. Linton

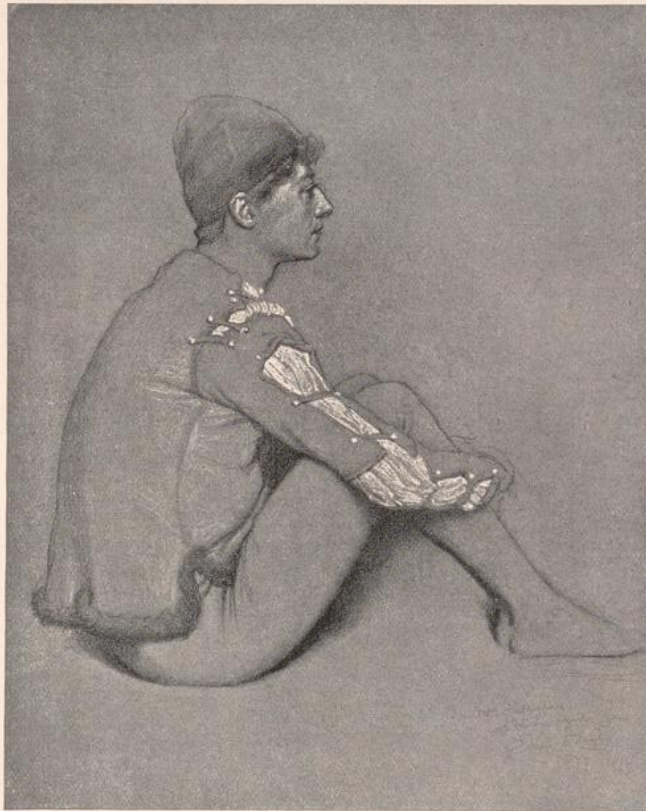
Decamerone, that has recently been exhibited at the New Gallery deserves to be particularly singled out. It is emphatically a painting of the best and most sincere type, but it has no affectations, and is neither morbid nor extravagant. Close study of nature gives it strength and actuality, and in every detail it shows sound scholarship and accurate knowledge. Yet its accuracy is not pedantic, and no mechanical mannerism spoils its charm of style, because an exact balance has been kept between realism and decorative convention. The precision that marks the effort of a thorough craftsman who has mastered the many details of artistic practice distinguishes it most completely; but it has, too, the fancy and delicate freshness that are to be discerned only in the work of an imaginative man who has kept his ideals clean and wholesome by constant reference to Nature's daintiest suggestions. There is nothing uncertain or experimental about

the picture, no hint that imperfect observation has had to be concealed by an affectation of cleverness; it is throughout accomplished, thorough, and sincere, a design that pleases by its ingenuity and attracts by its refinement and good taste, without laying itself open to a single objection on the score of insufficient conviction.

It is only necessary to look at the preliminary studies that the artist prepared to guide him in the carrying out of the actual painting to understand how much care he has taken to make sure of his facts before investing them in the atmosphere of romance that is so agreeable a feature of the completed work. All the component parts of the composition have been separately studied, and every detail has been examined apart from its surroundings; and upon a foundation of exact knowledge, acquired by a large amount of preliminary labour, the building up of the picture

has proceeded securely and without any of that uncertainty that is the penalty of inadequate preparation. Beyond doubt, this manner of working has enabled Sir James to avoid those accidents that are almost inevitable when an artist enters upon an exacting undertaking in a spirit of light-hearted irresponsibility, and trusts to chance to pull him through difficulties. It has kept him, at all events, from any hesitation in setting down his true convictions, and has given to his work an air of authority that is beyond question.

His picture is, indeed, excellent as a corrective to the warped and reckless indifference to sound principles that has gained so great a hold upon many of our painters. It shows them that suavity and elegance may be secured without artificiality, and that thoroughness is possible without pedantry. It is a reminder to them that the modern man who



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SCENE IN THE DECAMERONE"

BY SIR JAMES D. LINTON

The National Competition, 1900



DESIGN BASED ON A FLOWERING PLANT

BY EDITH A. JULIA WRIGHT

knows the mechanism of his craft can still take his place beside the masters of decorative painting who were the ornaments of past centuries; and, above all, it repeats, with an emphasis that cannot be misunderstood, the great truth that æsthetic successes are only within the reach of those men who are prepared to strive for them with honest sincerity. B. S.

THE NATIONAL COMPETITION, 1900. BY ESTHER WOOD.

THE annual exhibition of works sent up to the South Kensington examiners from the various art classes throughout the kingdom was



FURNITURE COVERING

BY W. STODDART



DESIGN FOR A WOVEN FABRIC

BY REGINALD WEST

opened at the Royal College of Art at the end of July—a time somewhat ill chosen for Londoners, making the exhibition occupy the holiday season, but perhaps convenient for provincial visitors, to whom it widely appeals. Of the London schools,