

INTRODUCTION to *Randolph Schwabe Memorial Exhibition Catalogue*: The Arts Council: 1951. Charles Tennyson.

RANDOLPH SCHWABE was born, in 1885, the son of a Manchester cotton merchant, whose father had come over from Germany in 1820. He was a precocious child, for he could read to himself for pleasure at four years old and had already developed a passion for drawing. Soon after this his family moved to Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire, where he attended a private school as a day-boy. There he illustrated entirely himself a school magazine which his brother edited, and in his last term had the satisfaction of seeing one of his drawings, representing the Diamond Jubilee celebrations at Hemel Hempstead, reproduced in a local paper. At fourteen his normal education ceased and he went to the Royal College of Art as a student. This, however, proved a grievous disappointment. The basis of the teaching at the College was still the making of elaborate charcoal studies from casts, months often being spent on a single drawing. To young Schwabe, with his enthusiasm and already well-developed talent, this was completely stultifying. His release from bondage came through a chance meeting with an old school-fellow, who was working at the Slade and who suggested that he should seek a transfer. Within a few days this was arranged and he settled down happily in Gower Street under those two great teachers, Frederick Brown and Henry Tonks. At the Slade, Schwabe found his spiritual home. He worked there tirelessly and enthusiastically for four and a half years and then studied for eight months under Jean Paul Laurens at the Academie Julien in Paris. Thence he travelled to Italy, working for some time at Rome and visiting Florence and other Italian cities. This visit laid the foundation of a profound knowledge of Italian art and architecture which was to be of immense value to him afterwards.

The remainder of his life falls into three divisions; the first extending to the end of the First World War, the out-break of which found him married and settled in an ancient and dilapidated house (now demolished) in Cheyne Row just west of Oakley Street. He was already beginning to be well known as a draughtsman, etcher and lithographer, and, as his frail physique and uncertain health made it impossible for him to serve in the armed forces, the authorities very wisely appointed him an official war artist. An excellent collection of the drawings which he made of the work of the Women's Land Army is now at the Imperial War Museum.

The second period, 1918 to 1930, was one steadily increasing reputation. He began to teach at Camberwell and Westminster, and played an important part in the re-organization of the Royal College of Art, as teacher of drawing under Sir William Rothenstein. He exhibited regularly at the New English Art Club, of which he had become a member in 1917, and at the Friday Club and its successor, the London Group. He also made a thorough study of costume, writing an admirable book on *Historic Costume* in collaboration with F. M. Kelly (published 1925) and a *Short History of Costume and Armour* (published 1931), taking a practical interest in costume for the stage and a still more important interest in the ballet. In this, he was closely associated with Mr. C. W. Beaumont as publisher, for whom he illustrated several books on these and other subjects. It was characteristic of his thoroughness and intellectual interest in his art that for one of these books, Cecchetti's *Manual of Classical Theatrical Dancing*, he executed a large number of small diagrammatic line drawings, illustrating dance steps and poses - work which most artists would have found repulsive.

During these years, he gradually gave up painting in oil and concentrated more and more on drawing with pen, pencil and water-colour, becoming generally recognized as a master in these fields.

In 1930, on the death of Henry Tonks, he was appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of London and Principal of the Slade School. The appointment was, perhaps, unexpected, but Schwabe's experience under Rothenstein at the Royal College,

and his eminence in what has always been regarded as the basis of teaching at the Slade - the art and science of drawing -- were undeniable qualifications. In character, too, he was admirably fitted for the post. He was enthusiastic, sympathetic and profoundly scholarly and, in spite of his gentle and hesitating manner, no one, not even his grim and often terrifying predecessor, could more clearly perceive or more tellingly rebuke superficial or evasive work. For eighteen years he devoted himself unsparingly to the work of the School, both academic and administrative, showing himself in every way a worthy successor of the great men who had preceded him.

That he continued at the same time to turn out such a large volume of fine creative work, was due to his extraordinary industry and the spontaneity of his art. To Schwabe drawing was as natural as breathing. He drew unceasingly during holiday times, both in winter and summer, often standing out of doors against a wall, in rain or snow, as long as light lasted, impervious to cold and discomfort; a pencil was seldom out of his hand at the Slade, and when he got home after a hard day's work he would sit sketching his companions at the fireside or the cat or dog on the hearth-rug, or perhaps toiling at some illustration for a book or commercial brochure. There is a tendency to regard Schwabe as chiefly an architectural draughtsman. He was, in fact, omnivorous. Portraits, figure-drawings, landscapes, buildings, still life, birds, animals, plants - his choice was one of opportunity rather than predilection, and he tackled, every problem, however seemingly trivial, with the same inspired concentration. For example, one warm day during his last illness he was able to sit out and begin a beautiful drawing of the kitchen garden (No.23), in the course of which he was observed to be making an accurate record of a row of cabbages, treating each plant as an individual study. When asked whether he thought this really necessary, he replied in evident astonishment, 'Why, every c-c-cabbage is as different from every other c-c-cabbage, as every man from every other man'.

He was equally many-sided in his conversation. Few people had such a wide knowledge of art and architect and of the by-ways of history and literature, and few could impart their knowledge with such charm and modesty -- enhanced in his case by the slight impediment in his speech.

Delightful, above all, was his sense of humour. How pleasant it was to see his venerable figure (already venerable in middle age) rise from its armchair to execute, with surprising agility, a few dance steps on the hearth-rug, or declaim (with the stammer always coming in at most effective moment) some limerick or a ballad from the music halls of his youth. No man was better company and no man's company was more prized by the young, for in few men's hearts did the fire of youth burn so brightly and so continuously