DRAWINGS OF SIR E. J. POYNTER, P.R.A.

DRAWINGS OF SIR E. J. POYNTER

MODERN MASTER
DRAUGHTSMEN

STUDY FOR ADVERTISEMENT OF
AN ASSURANCE COMPANY

DRAWINGS OF SIR E. J. POYNTER BART. P.R.A.

LONDON. GEORGE NEWNES LIMITED
SOUTHAMPTON STREET. STRAND. W.C
NEW YORK. CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

especially, as an astounding feat of reconstruction from insufficient data, to the magnificent reception hall, with its columns of ivory, cedar, and gold, in which King Solomon in all his glory is receiving the Queen of Sheba. These, to name no others, are testimony enough that, as far as architecture is concerned, his innate creative faculties are of no mean order. There is the less need, moreover, to labour this point in that the artist has himself put on record his own weighty estimation of the value to the painter of a well-founded understanding of the sister art. In one of his addresses to the students at the Slade School of Art, University College, Gower Street, London, delivered during his occupation of the Professorial chair, subsequently repeated elsewhere, and finally issued as a volume under the title of *Ten Lectures on Art*, he says, speaking of the early Italian masters, "you will not find any of whatever school that did not understand the artistic side of architecture, even if they did not practise it as a science," whereas, at the time he spoke, he doubted "if there be half-a-dozen figure painters in England who could introduce correctly a background of Classic or Gothic architecture into their pictures, much less design one;" for which reason he concluded, "I intend to make this an important object of study in this school, and the subjects I give for composition will be generally designed with a view to practice in this art. I cannot indeed imagine a better preparation for a student of painting than that he should have been in an architect's office."

The tendency to express himself in terms of sculpture is no less evident, though perhaps somewhat less directly apparent to casual or unexpert observation. It reveals itself, of course, patently enough in the technical correctness of those definite incursions into that field of art which he has made from time to time; for, besides modelling a number of bronze portrait medals in the Italian style, he was the designer of the medal presented to the victorious troops after the Ashantee War, took a not unimportant part in the æsthetic improvement of our silver coinage some years ago, and devised an exquisite suggestion for a flagon and basin representing in a series of panels the story of Cupid and Psyche, which unfortunately, owing to the commercial and wholly inartistic precipitation of some modern methods of production, was never carried into execution; and it is to be wished that he might yet find a sufficient interval of leisure in his busy life to follow the late Lord Leighton and Mr. G. F. Watts in their essays on life-size sculpture in the round. If less discernible, this sculpturesque stamp is equally demonstrable in his pictorial practice, and is shown among other more elusive resultants, by his cultivation of mass and line in arrangement and composition, his profounder search for and supremer

mastery over beauties and subtleties of form than those of colour, a soberness and dignity in his conceptions, and, though this may be stigmatised as fanciful, by a singular and probably unconscious propensity to present face and figure in profile.

The existence and relative intensity of these two intellectual undercurrents can scarcely be regarded otherwise than as striking examples of the hereditary descent of faculties, the weaker coming down from his great-grandfather, Thomas Banks, R.A., a sculptor of some celebrity, the stronger, less remotely, from his father, Ambrose Poynter, who did much sound, if no very sensationally distinguished work, in a day when English architecture was probably at its lowest ebb. Sir Edward himself, had he yielded to his father's intentions, would have followed in his footsteps, but a strong natural inclination towards painting, coupled in his earlier years with a threatening weakness of health, which seemed likely to render him ill-suited to the rougher out-of-door work incidental to the architect's profession, led him into the diverging path he has pursued with so much success. That, had fitting opportunities come to him, a far more vital factor in the career of an architect than in that of a painter, who can, to some extent, if it lies in him, make his own, he would have risen high in that branch of art cannot be doubted, even as his father, had he chosen, might unquestionably have attained eminence among the water-colour painters of his time, but the loss to British art of the many valuable services he has rendered it, both inside and outside the walls of his studio, would have been a heavy price to pay.

It was only with extreme reluctance that the father allowed his son to follow his bent, having for some unexplained reason great doubts as to the possibility of his achieving anything noteworthy, and by the irony of fate he was never destined to receive ocular demonstration of the fact that in thus taking his future into his own hands, in opposition to himself, his son had proved himself the wiser. Before the young painter had returned to London from finishing his studies in Paris, Mr. Poynter had been stricken with total blindness, and was consequently never able to judge for himself how erroneous had been his forecast of disaster, but he nevertheless followed his son's future career with keen interest and enthusiasm, and lived long enough to hear of most of his greatest pictorial triumphs, not dying until 1886, nine years after Sir Edward had obtained the full Academicianship.

To these mingled strains of the artist's ancestry we may also, doubtless, attribute his life-long enthusiasm for the work of Michel Angelo, the man in whose art Sculpture as an intimate and essential part of Architecture attained its highest culmination. This passionate devotion—it

can be adequately described in no colder phrase—was of very early growth, dating from his first visit to Rome in 1853. The late George du Maurier, in the vivid and accurate picture of student life in Paris during the later fifties of last century which he has sketched for all the reading world in the pages of Trilby, has entertainingly depicted its incipient phrases. "Then there was Lorimer," he wrote prophetically eleven years ago, "the industrious apprentice, who is now also well pinnacled on high; himself a pillar of the Royal Academy—probably, if he lives long enough, its future President—the duly knighted or baroneted Lord Mayor of "all the plastic arts" (except one or two, perhaps, here and there, that are not altogether without some importance)." The personal description which follows is purposely inaccurate and misleading, although, with an odd inconsistency, the author, in the accompanying illustration, revived, as nearly as memory allowed, his model's appearance at the time he wrote of, but the account of his mental attitude is, in the main, rigidly veracious. "He was a most eager, earnest, and painstaking young enthusiast, of precocious culture, who read improving books, and did not share in the amusements of the quartier latin, but spent his evenings at home with Handel, Michel Angelo, and Dante, on the respectable side of the river." Later on he continues, "Enthusiast as he was, he could only worship one god at a time. It was either Michel Angelo, Phidias, Paul Veronese, Tintoret, Raphael, or Titian—never a modern; moderns didn't exist! And so thoroughgoing was he in his worship, and so persistent in voicing it, that he made those immortals quite unpopular in the Place St. Anatole des Arts. We grew to dread their very names. Each of them would last him a couple of months or so; then he would give us a month's holiday, and take up another." There is, of course, a touch of burlesque, even of extravaganza, in all this, and there is certainly no truth in the alleged ephemerality of his admirations, but there is no question but that we have here a very exact impression of Poynter's intense seriousness as regards his chosen work, for that Lorimer was drawn from him is nowadays no more a secret than the fact, which the late "Jimmy" Whistler in his real or simulated fury published far and wide, that he was the original of the, it must be owned, far from flattering, however truthful portrait of the other, The Idle Apprentice, Joe Sibley.

That he did and does fully appreciate the distinguished qualities of the other artists named above need not be doubted, but no one of them has exercised so deep and lasting an influence on his artistic development as Michel Angelo. On a close and intelligent study of his methods he has very largely founded his own, and the spirit that

inspires both may pardonably be denoted a rightly scientific one. In an unfinished work by the Italian master in the National Gallery it is seen that he was in the habit of first underpainting the whole design in green and white, and this careful custom Sir Edward adopted for many years. To each the human figure, and more especially the male figure, in energetic action irresistibly appeals, and in the subjects which he chose when he first began to realise his powers and before other, highly important, but none the less distracting duties came to interfere with regular painting, in *Israel in Egypt*, in *The Catapult*, in *Atalanta's Race*, he displayed just such swirl and movement of more or less nude forms as Michel Angelo delighted in. In his designs for decorative work on a large scale he has testified even more unmistakably to his faith, and, on the rare occasions when British indifference to the use of the fine arts in ameliorating the sordid conditions of life has allowed him the opportunity, he has shown how deeply he had taken to heart the lesson learned in the Sistine Chapel at Rome. Convinced that in this mural decoration had soared to its highest possible level, he developed his own schemes on parallel lines, though without any slavish imitation. Unluckily national parsimoniousness, for not even hypocrisy can pretend that our poverty is the cause, has in two of his most imposing conceptions thwarted consummation, and the great fresco for the apse of the Lecture Theatre in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the mosaic for the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral remain magnificent but unaccomplished dreams.

It is, however, chiefly in those preliminary studies, a number of which we are privileged to reproduce in this volume, that the full effects of these three influences are most remarkable. In the bold vigour of his generalizations, in the minute and searching attention to details, and in the broad and masterly use of the material, be it charcoal, chalk, or pencil, we perceive how conscientiously he has laid to heart the example long since set by Michel Angelo; in the noble casting of the draperies and the finely handled flesh-forms we see the bent of the Sculptor; while the determination not to rest content with a knowledge, however unfailing, of the mere surface effects but to understand as thoroughly the muscular movements which give rise to them, and, going deeper still, the boney scaffolding on which these in turn depend, reveals the constructive mind of the Architect.

Without indulging in a specious but empty analogy we may fittingly compare one of his finished pictures with a completed building. Through all his work the preponderating importance of sound and perfectly understood construction runs as a first consideration, and that also is the keynote of his teaching as embodied in the *Ten Lectures on*

Art, previously referred to. "A profound and thorough knowledge of nature," "a knowledge of natural forms and a fully-trained power of imitating them," "a continuous and determined study of the figure," "an intelligent use of the point in drawing which proceeds naturally from the study of the figure," "the lines made in shading should always be indicative of the construction," "knowledge of all the technical and practical details," "the knowledge of the human form in all its infinite varieties of action and position," such are the ideals he held up before his pupils. Steady and unwearying industry in order to attain merely technical perfection is the first necessity: "the only essence of good art is to be found, above all things, in honest and good workmanship," "work done really in earnest and with a spirit of patience has always in it something of value, and I may add that no good work can ever be done without this spirit." "Remember that the first essential to a good artist is that he should be a good workman." Not that skilful handling, dexterous treatment, even accurate drawing and truthful colouring are the sole ends in themselves, as so many painters seem to maintain nowadays, "the aim of all high art is—the aim of all art (except that which professes to be portraiture) should be to create a world in which our imagination should be excited to the contemplation of noble and beautiful ideas;" and again, "the true object of art is to create a world: not to imitate constantly what is before our eyes," and to do this the artist must have intellectual as well as manual training, "it is quite as important for an artist to cultivate his mind as his hand." Yet when all is said, the greatest genius that ever lived can only create a new world by discovering and rearranging the beauties of the one around him; nor need this inevitable restriction limit his possibilities, "nature contains greater depths than we can fathom." It is his first task to plumb these ever more and more profoundly, and the way to achieve that is pointed out with no hesitancy, "constant study from the life-model is the only means . . . . of arriving at a comprehension of the beauty in nature and of avoiding its ugliness and deformity;" study that overlooks nothing, that regards nothing as indifferent, that with the eye of assured knowledge can pierce below the outer integument and see the hidden principles beneath mere surface features. Speaking of the collar-bone, selected simply as an illustration of his meaning, he says, "in order that he may draw it with accuracy . . . . it is necessary that he should know its form, the part it plays in the construction of the body, where it is attached at either end, and by what muscles it is surrounded." And as with the figure so with every other detail in the contemplated picture, "trees and rocks have as it were bones and sinews which underlie what is apparent to

the superficial observer," and when the general features of the figure have been mastered, "then must follow separate studies of the hands, feet, heads, and draperies . . . . and of any other accessories that may be required in the picture." Finally, to bring to an end quotations, which might be almost indefinitely extended, from a volume which sets up for the student and lover of art a standard, high indeed, but pre-eminently sane, sound, and practical, with none of the misty and fantastic Utopianism which marks Mr. Ruskin's dogmatic *obiter dicta*, "all work should be done with a view to its being final, the touch or the line put on should be intended to remain."

It would be as easy as agreeable to demonstrate at length how ceaselessly and untiringly the artist has followed in practice the wise, if rigorous, precepts of the author; but the illustrations which follow establish the point more convincingly than any written words could do. They cover practically the whole of his career, extending in time from the first drawing done under definite instruction at Leigh's art school in 1855, the subject of which by a singular coincidence happened to be the same as Mr. Watts selected for one of his first exhibited works at the Royal Academy, A Heron, to one made this spring for the picture by which the President is represented in this year's Academy, and include studies for many of his most important works, *Israel in Egypt*, though not *The Catapult*, with which he followed up the success of his first great picture, the fresco of *The Stoning of St. Stephen*, which, it is to be feared, is too little known to Londoners, though it is to be seen no farther away than Dulwich; the two designs for the Ashantee medal, the first and finest of which, conceived in a purely classical spirit, failed to secure the approval of Her Majesty the late Queen; *Atalanta's Race*, the greatest of the four large decorative panels painted for the late Lord Wharncliffe to adorn the billiard-room at Wortley Hall; the scheme for the dome of St. Paul's, previously referred to; the splendid *Queen of Sheba's Visit to Solomon*, which, to England's irreparable loss, has gone to far-away Sidney, to set a noble example of imaginative and technical achievement before the artists of Australia; and several of those lighter works which the urgent calls upon his time by the serious demands of the official work of the National Gallery and the Royal Academy have alone allowed him to undertake of recent years, such as *Idle Fears*, *Horæ Serenæ*, and *The Storm Nymphs*. The subjects of these drawings are as varied as the purposes for which they were made. We have a rough sketch of the main lines of the composition and the arrangement of light and shade for *The Storm Nymphs*, and a more fully elaborated design for *Helena and Hermia*. The nude

figure, both male and female, holds, naturally enough, in Sir Edward's work a leading place, ranging from the careful precision of the earlier studies for *Israel in Egypt* to the delicate facility of the childish figure for *The Cup of Tantalus*. True to his own teaching of the policy of thorough, we find a number of those "separate studies of the hands, feet, head, and draperies," the necessity for which he so decisively insists upon. Of his trained appreciation and command of the use of these last in especial we have ample evidence, and whether in the vivid movement of the flying Atalanta or in the dignified repose of the figures for St. Paul's, we may see how complete is his knowledge and how sure his taste. Even the smaller accessories, which many artists would feel justified in "painting out of their heads," receive equally careful attention, witness the studies of vine-leaves, apples and pears, and the gnarled and hollow tree-trunk. The landscapes and architectural drawings made in Madeira, Italy, and Capri, are more in the nature of holiday tasks, the outcome of his inexhaustible energy, which will not allow him to be idle when he might, and even should, be resting; but, apart from their individual beauty and technical skill, they serve as admirable illustrations of that "certainty and celerity" which he inculcates. "It is far from sufficient," he says in his eighth lecture, Objects of Study, "that a student should be able to get his drawing right in the end; unless he acquires the habit of getting it right at once his accuracy will be of little use to him; it is certainty and celerity that he has to aim at."

Patience and industry, a stern refusal to accept in his own work or in that of others under his control the deadly "good enough," the determination to understand, and above and before all work, work, and yet again work, are the secrets of his success, and a brief summary of his life-story will explain what that success has been, as an examination of the contents of this volume will show how well and hardly it has been earned.

Of direct Huguenot descent Edward John Poynter was born, on March 26th, 1836, in Paris, which his parents, though resident in London, were temporarily visiting. His childhood was passed partly in one of those houses in Poets' Corner, now swept away, under the shadow of the venerable Abbey of Westminster, and later in Queen Anne's Gate. He was first sent to the adjacent Westminster School, but the air of London was considered injurious to his delicate health, and he was removed first to Brighton and then to Ipswich Grammar School, where the Rev. D. Rigaud, under whom he had been at Westminster, was head master. The harsh east-coast climate, however, proved no more congenial, and in the autumn of 1852 his school career

was brought to a close, and, the doctors fearing a threatening of consumption, he was sent to Madeira for the winter, where his time was divided between lessons with a tutor and drawing or painting in water-colours, the rudiments of which latter art had been imparted to him by Mr. Thomas Boys. The next year may be said to have been the most critical of his life, since in November he met at Rome Frederick Leighton, then at work on the well-known Cimabue procession, and thus not only initiated a close personal friendship, which lasted till Leighton's death, but determined his own future career. He was thenceforth resolved to be a painter, and on his return to England he set seriously to work, first at Leigh's, in Newman Street, next under the direction of Mr. W. C. T. Dobson, R.A., and finally at the Royal Academy. But art instruction in England at that time was something worse than futile, and a visit to the Paris International Exhibition of 1855 convinced him that nowhere but in that city could he obtain such a thorough training as would alone satisfy him. Through the Baron de Triqueti, a sculptor whose work may be seen at Windsor, who had married his aunt, he obtained an introduction to Gleyre, and under him he worked from 1856 to 1859. For a time after leaving Gleyre he shared a studio in the Rue Notre-Dame des Champs with George du Maurier, Thomas Lamont the lovable "Laird" of Trilby, and Thomas Armstrong, and there he painted two pictures, *Mercury with the Cattle of Apollo* and *Heaven's Messenger* from Dante. The first, on his final settlement in London in 1860 was submitted to the British Institution, now defunct, and the second to the Academy, and both were rejected. A pen-and-ink drawing of a girl, *Alla Veneziana*, was more fortunate at the Academy next year, and in 1862 the previously condemned *Heaven's Messenger* was accorded an unenviable position in close proximity to the ceiling. By a quaint chance, when he was elected Academician years later and had to deposit a picture during the preparation of his diploma work, this was the only one that was available. We must perforce hasten over these earlier works, which included cartoons for stained-glass windows, the decoration of the ceiling of Waltham Abbey, and no small part in the revival of artistic wood-engraving for purposes of illustration which was attempted by the brothers Dalziel. In the meantime he was steadily working away at the picture which was destined to first draw general attention to him. Devised to begin with as a representation of *Work* at one of the evening meetings of the Langham Sketching Club, this conception of the captive Hebrews painfully dragging to its place before an Egyptian temple the immense granite Sphynx, received so much applause from the members present

that the artist subsequently developed the idea in a water-colour dated 1862, and finally, after years of patient toil, presented it in 1867 at the Royal Academy to public judgment. Its success was instantaneous. It received the honour of forming the basis of a cartoon in Punch, and was purchased by the famous engineer Sir John Hawkshaw, an unqualified testimony to its scientific soundness. The exhibition the following year of *The Catapult* showed beyond cavil that the young artist had "arrived," and the same winter he was elected to the Associateship. A commission for a Mosaic representing St. George, Fortitude, and Purity for the Houses of Parliament came two years later, and was soon followed by one for the four pictures for Wortley Hall, *Perseus and Andromeda* exhibited in 1872, *More of More Hall and the Dragon of Wantley*, a local legend, *Atalanta's Race*, and *Nausicaa*, the last of which was finished in 1879, a lapse of time explained by the many other engagements which pressed upon him. In 1871 he was appointed first Professor of the newly-founded Slade School of Art at University College; during 1872 and 1873 he was employed upon the fresco at St. Stephen's, Dulwich, and in 1875 he became Director for Art and Principal of the National Art Training Schools at South Kensington, which necessitated his resignation of the Slade Professorship. Two years later he became full Academician. Despite these conflicting interests he was still busy at his easel, and exhibited in 1880 the most beautiful and poetical picture he has produced, *The Visit to Æsculapius*, to the purchase of which by the Chantrey Bequest Trustees not even the most rancorous railer has been found to object. Considering how beneficial his influence at South Kensington has been, it seems ungrateful to grumble at the incidental disadvantages, but it cannot be doubted that the endless interruptions arising from his official duties in the Schools and in the Museum did to far too great an extent divert his artistic advance towards its apparently predestined goal of real greatness. Not indeed altogether, for *The Ides of March* (1883) and *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* are among the most powerful and impressive of his productions, and will remain as astounding proofs of what indefatigable industry can accomplish under difficulties. The last indeed, with its gorgeous wealth of decorative detail and complicated groupings of numberless figures, would have been no small achievement for a man free to devote his whole time and thought to its creation; as the result of the intervals between other responsible and exacting obligations it is no exaggeration to call it marvellous.

The other works of the period, *Under the Sea Wall*, *A Corner in the Villa*, *Diadumené*, *On the Temple Steps*, *High Noon*, *Horæ Serenæ*,

The Ionian Dance, etc., though full of charm and executed with the loving care which he accords even to the most trifling task, must rather be regarded as the slighter emanations of a preoccupied mind. Space has not permitted, hitherto, of any reference to his profound knowledge of the history of art and the works of the earlier masters, but this is well known, and it was generally recognised when, in 1894, he was offered and accepted the Directorship of the National Gallery, that no wiser selection could have been made. During his tenure of the office, which, having exceeded the age limit imposed by the wisdom of our legislators on all public servants except His Majesty's judges, he has recently resigned, a great improvement was noticeable, and that it was not even more conspicuous was due in part to the ineradicable stinginess of the Treasury, in part to the extraordinary system by which the desires of the specially appointed expert are overruled by the decisions of a more or less irresponsible and disinterested body of Trustees.

This official stamp of approbation was confirmed in 1896 by his fellow artists when, after the death of Sir John Millais, which followed with such painful swiftness on that of Lord Leighton, he was elected to the office of President of the Royal Academy, on which occasion he also received the customary honour of a knighthood, a rank which was raised to a baronetage in 1902.

The demands upon the time of the President are more frequent and more varied than is generally realised, but now that, having paid an ample tribute to the service of his country, these alone remain to distract him, and he therefore finds himself in command of a more untrammeled leisure, which for him means only of freer opportunities for work, we may reasonably hope that he will yet again rise from the lower plane of pretty fancies, to which he has of necessity confined himself during recent years, to that lofty level of constructive, imaginative work to which he has more than once triumphantly attained in the past.

ILLUSTRATIONS

STUDY FOR THE MOSAIC FOR ST. PAUL'S (1882)

STUDY OF A HERON (1855)

PLATE II

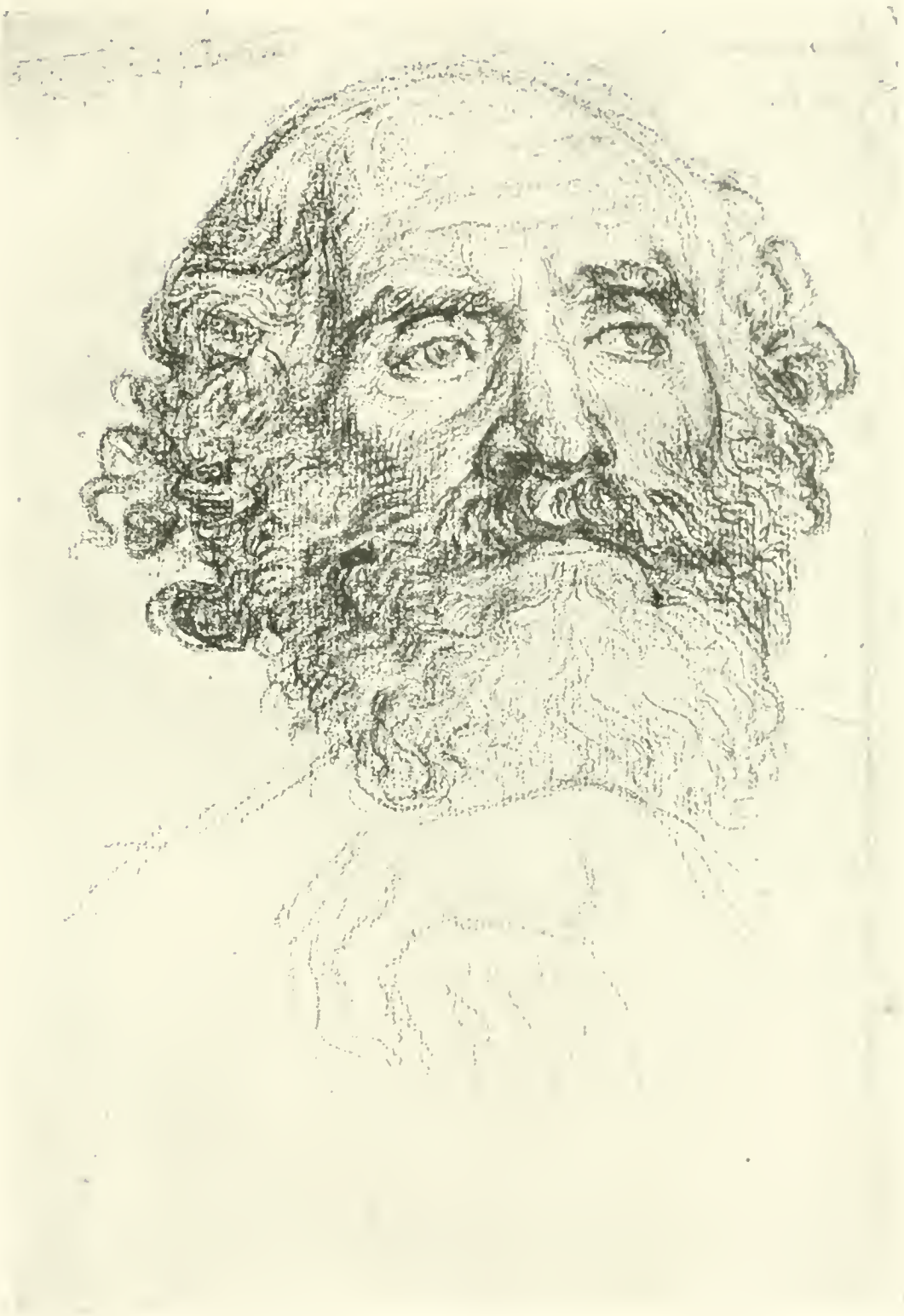
STUDY FOR AN ILLUSTRATION

STUDY FOR "HORÆ SERENÆ" (1886)

STUDY FOR "ST. STEPHEN" 1872

STUDY FOR THE FRESCO OF ST. STEPHEN (1872)

STUDY FOR UNFINISHED PICTURE, "ENDYMION"



STUDY FOR THE FRESCO OF ST. STEPHEN (1872-3)

FIRST DESIGN FOR THE ASHANTEE MEDAL (1874)

STUDIES FOR ST. PAUL'S (1882)

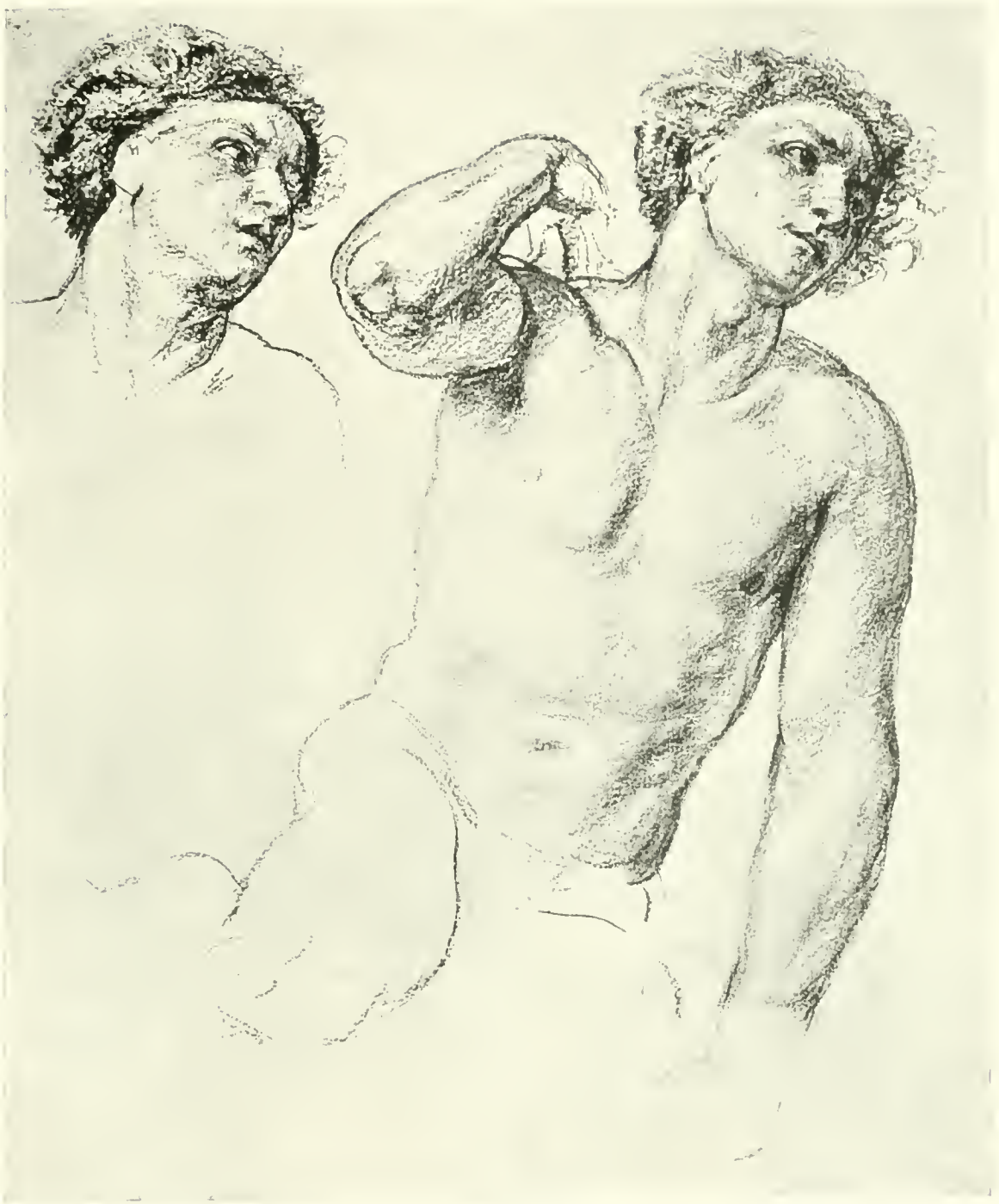
FIGURE STUDIES

SECOND DESIGN FOR THE ASHANTEE MEDAL (1874)

STUDY FOR THE DRAPERY OF ATALANTA IN "ATALANTA'S RACE" (1876)

STUDY FOR "HORÆ SERENÆ" (1894)

STUDY FOR ATALANTA IN "ATALANTA'S RACE" (1876)



STUDY FOR "ATALANTA'S RACE" (1876)

STUDY FOR THE ARMOUR IN THE "ST. GEORGE" MOSAIC (1869)

STUDY FOR THE SCIENCE CERTIFICATE, SOUTH KENSINGTON

FUNCHAL, MADEIRA (1877)

STUDY FOR "THE CUP OF TANTALUS" (1905)

PICO GRANDE, MADEIRA (1877)

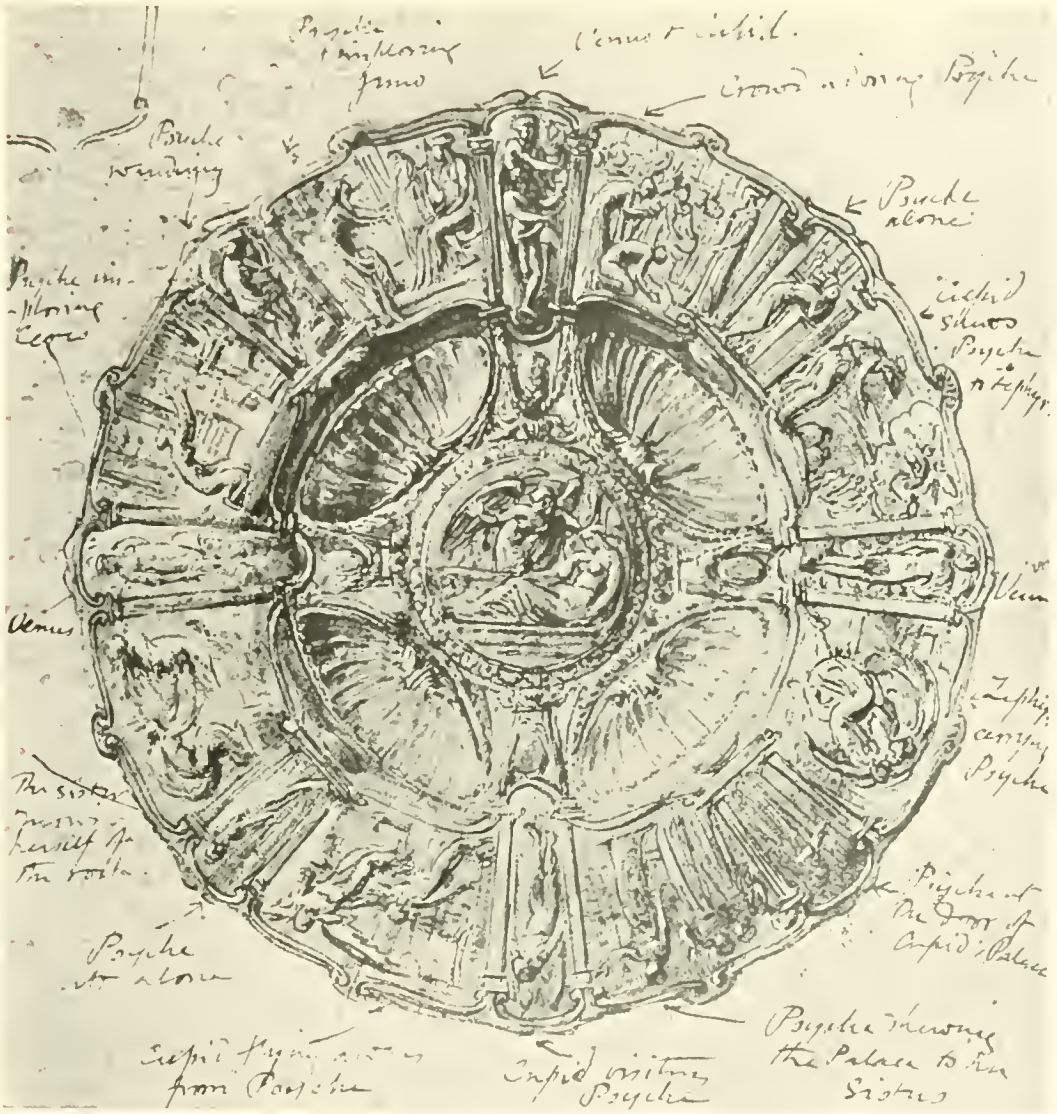
STUDY OF A TREE-TRUNK

STUDY FOR "THE QUEEN OF SHEBA" (1890)

STUDY OF VINE LEAVES (1878)

DESIGN FOR THE "PSYCHE" FLAGON (1878)

STUDY FOR "HORÆ SERENÆ" (1886)



DESIGN FOR THE "PSYCHE" BASIN (1878)

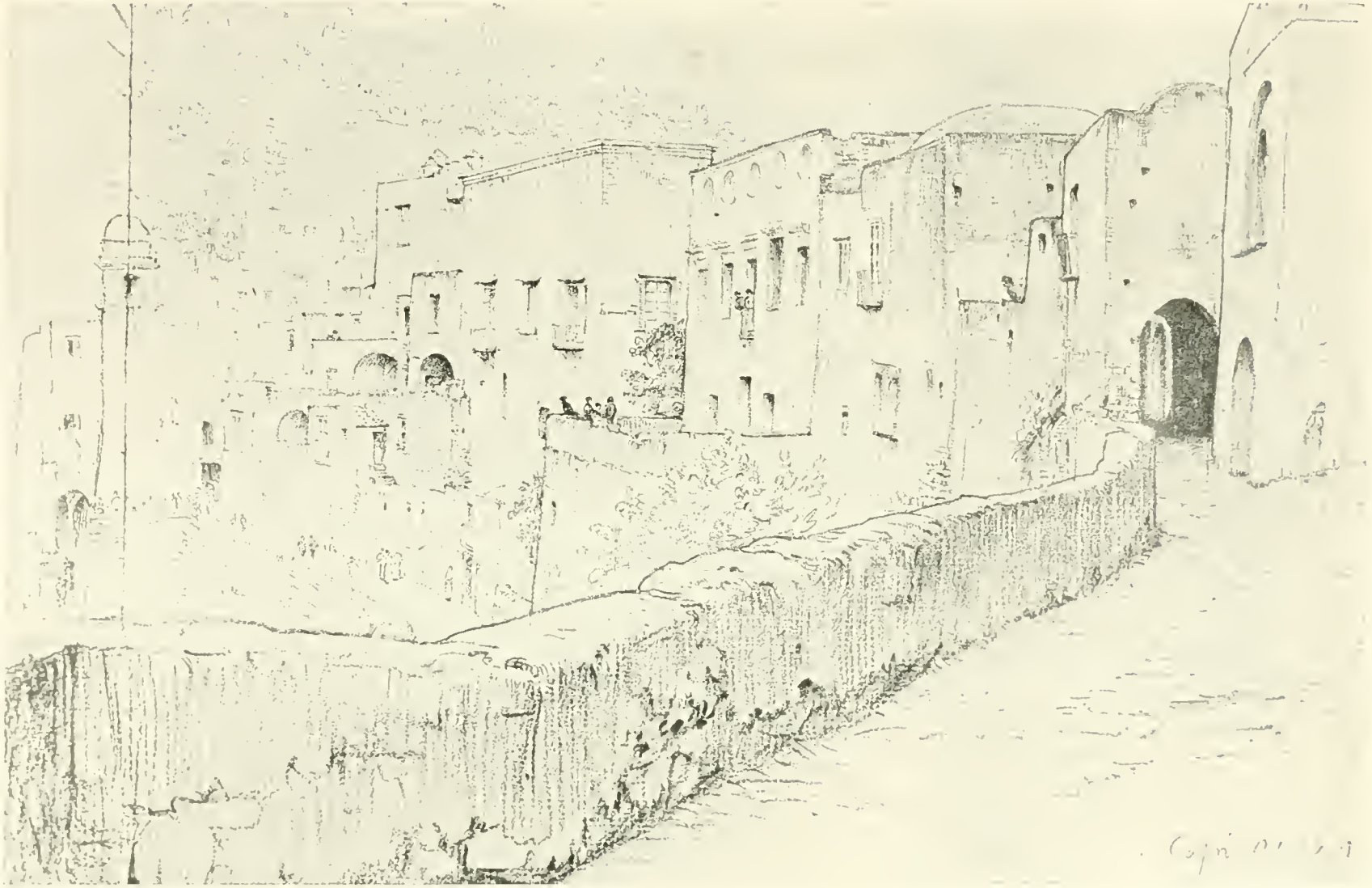
TREVISO (1879)

STUDY FOR "DIADUMENÉ" (1884)

CASTELFRANCO (1879)

STUDY OF APPLES (1881)

STUDY FOR "STORM NYMPHS" (1901)



CAPRI (1881)

LOCH LUICHART (1882)

STUDY FOR "IDLE FEARS" (1894)

STUDY FOR THE MOSAIC FOR ST. PAUL'S (1882)

STUDY FOR THE MOSAIC FOR ST. PAUL'S (1882)

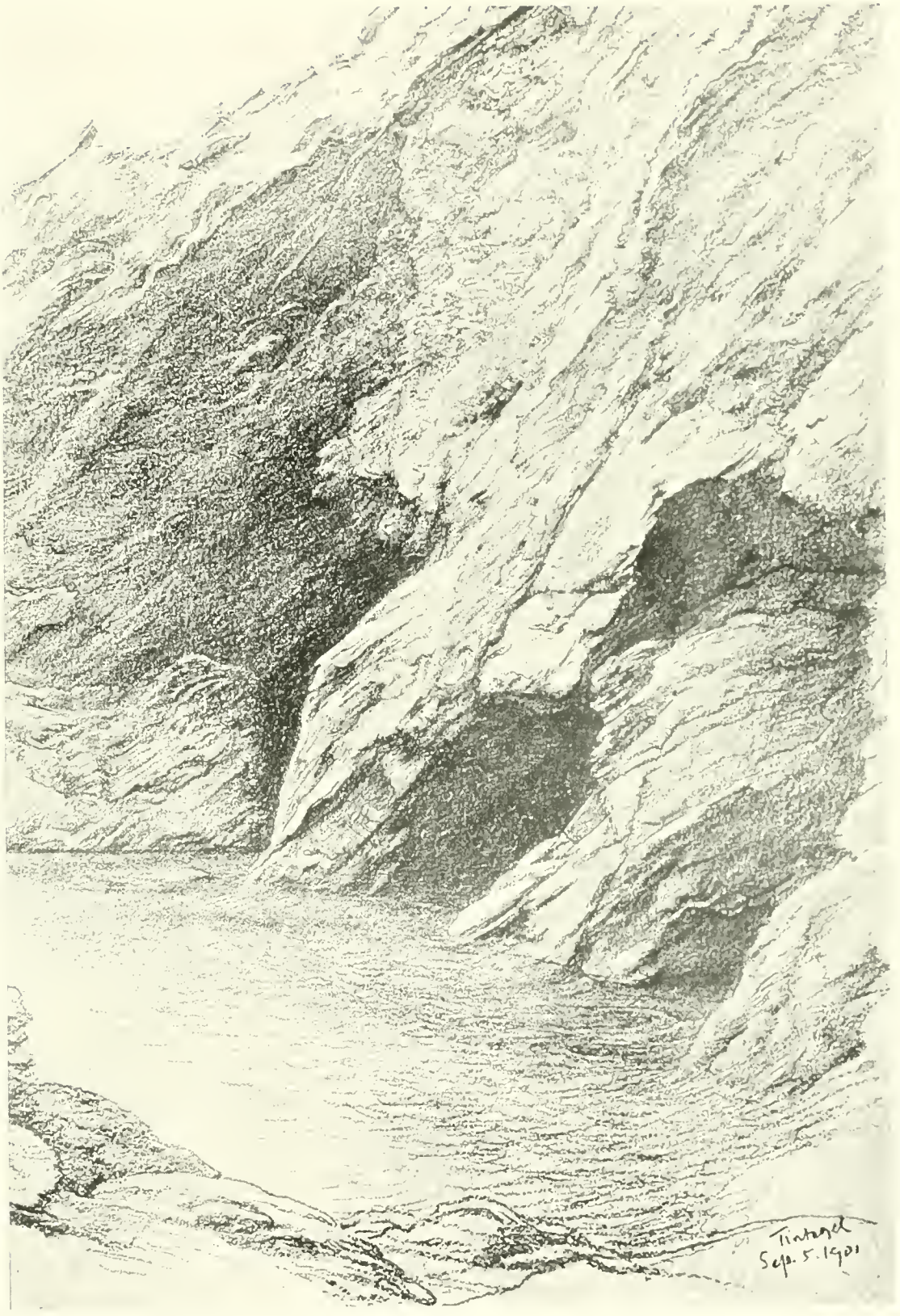
STUDIES FOR "WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG"

STUDY FOR THE HEAD OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA (1890)

STUDY OF CLIFFS AT TINTAGEL (1901)

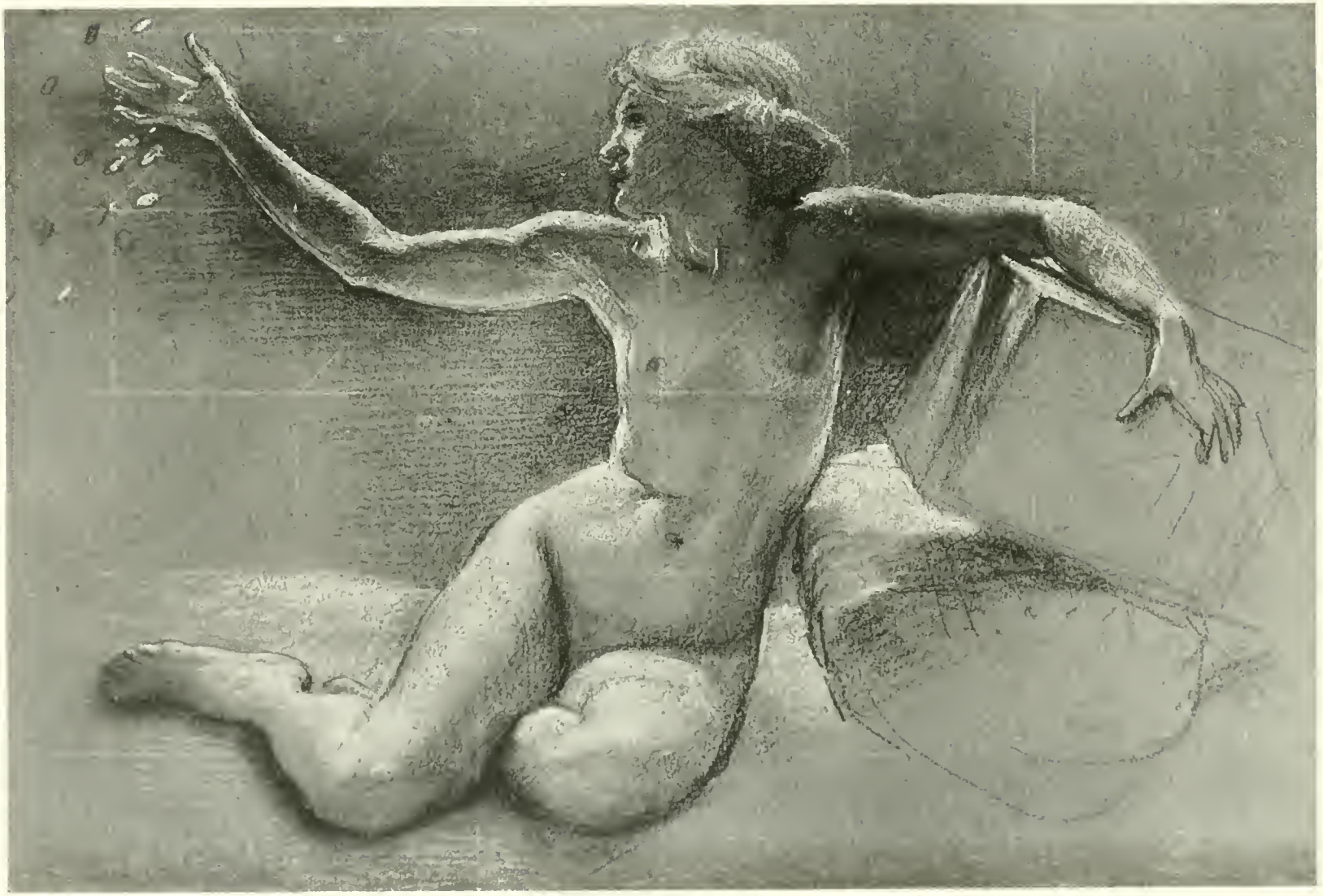
STUDY FOR ARCHITECTURE IN THE ACADEMY ADDRESS TO THE QUEEN ON THE DIAMOND JUBILEE (1887)

STUDY FOR "THE IONIAN DANCE"



STUDY OF CLIFFS AT TINTAGEL (1901)

STUDY FOR "STORM NYMPHS" (1901)



STUDY FOR "STORM NYMPHS" (1901)

DESIGN FOR "HERMIA AND HELENA"

STUDY FOR "STORM NYMPHS" (1901)

STUDY OF A HEAD IN "HERMIA AND HELENA"