

## THE QUEEN'S SCULPTOR.



SINCE the death of Sir Edgar Boehm, R.A., the post of Sculptor-in-Ordinary to the Queen has remained vacant; but even when that artist held the official position, there was yet another sculptor who was consulted by her Majesty on matters pertaining to his art, and who executed the majority of her private commissions. For more than twenty years, indeed, has Mr. F. J. Williamson been thus honoured, and during that period has executed busts and statuettes of most of the members of the royal family, besides several ideal works which have been secured for the royal collections. It follows then that Mr. Williamson has had an interesting career and exceptional opportunities for meeting interesting personages and experiences.

In a quaint old house—once “The Grapes” inn and coaching-house—in the quiet village of Esher, Mr. Williamson established his home

*F. J. Williamson*  
*F. J. Williamson*

thirty-eight years ago, and in studios there, some of which formed the outhouses of the aforetime inn, the principal work of his life has been executed. Surrounded by charming landscapes characteristic of Surrey, and out of reach of the noisy bustle and murky atmosphere of the metropolis, it is an ideal spot for an artist to live and work in. At the rear of the garden are the beautiful grounds of Claremont.

Success in art is only to be attained, as in other vocations, by steady and unremitting application to work. And Mr. Williamson has proved the truism in his own experience;

his life's story can be summarised by "work, work, and again work." The result is a record, which, while free from exciting adventure, is one that can be scanned with pride and satisfaction. Born in 1833 in the heart of London (Camden Town) he attended, as a boy, a private school at Hampstead. Each day he walked the whole distance, and it was during this time that his love for art first declared itself. In a monumental mason's yard in the Euston Road—a most unpromising spot!—he saw a figure in stone representing "Faith." This caught his youthful attention and fascinated him. He sketched the figure over and over again until he had a fair representation of it, and from thenceforward his aspirations tended art-wards, and more especially to sculpture. After a time he was brought under the notice of the late John Bell, the sculptor of the Guards' Memorial in Waterloo Place. When he left school, Mr. Bell gave him permission to work in his studio, but soon after advised him to attend the modelling class at Somerset House—at that time the home of the Royal Academy—of which John Bell was the instructor.

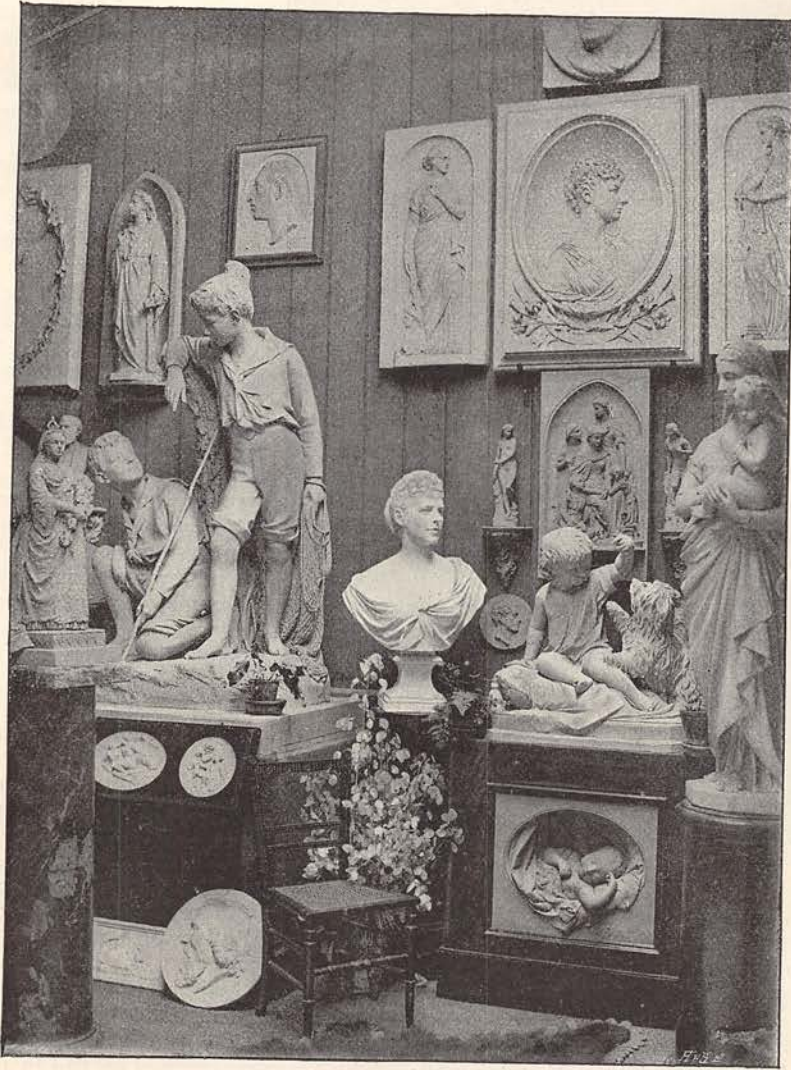
It was while attending this class that he was introduced to J. Foley, R.A., the leading sculptor of the day. Some of his work was shown to this artist, who expressed his pleasure, and invited him to work in his studio. This he did for four months, when he was bound as an artiled pupil—the only one Foley ever had—for seven years. Sculpture in those days was looked upon as a very high art indeed, and the classic treatment of subjects insisted upon by its professors; and it was upon these principles that young Williamson's early training was based.

Some amusing incidents occurred at the commencement of his work, and although the laugh is against himself in the following story, Mr. Williamson tells it with a smiling face, and enjoys the joke as well as his hearers. It might be said, by the way, that he is a delightful *raconteur*, and has an apparently inexhaustible store of anecdotes and stories.

One of his first attempts at creative work was a figure of Hamlet, the incident in the Prince of Denmark's career chosen being that in scene v., in the first act, where Hamlet



IN THE LARGE STUDIO.

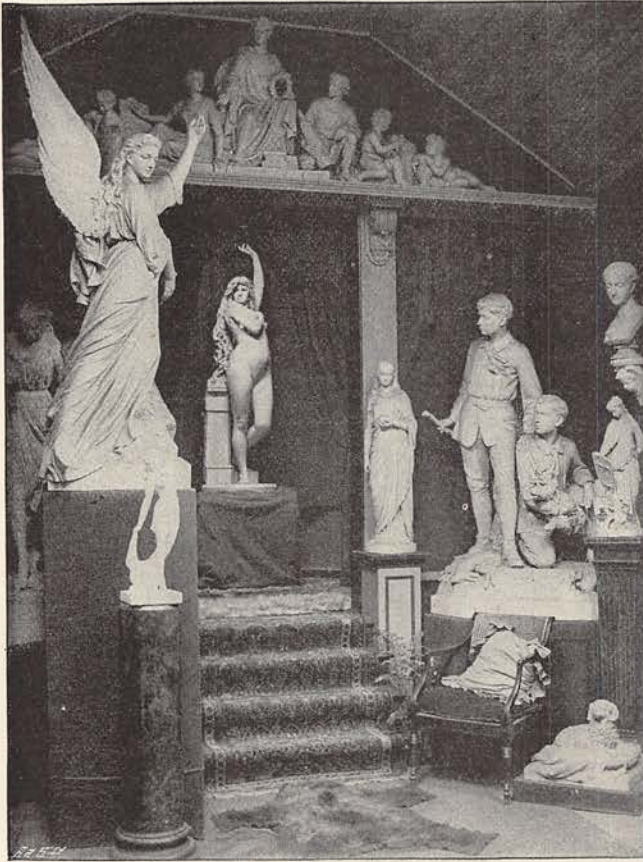


A BIT OF THE STUDIO.

makes Horatio and Marcellus swear upon his sword that they will not divulge the secret of the ghost's appearance. The clay model was completed, and was to be taken to Kensington for the inspection of John Bell. This necessitated a walk right across Hyde Park, and Hamlet was carefully packed in a box for the journey. But alas! the young sculptor's knowledge did not include an acquaintance with the skeleton supports upon which the clay figures are built up, and when prompted by curiosity, when about half the walk had been accomplished, to see how his prince was progressing, what a scene of desolation was revealed! Although the box

had been carefully handled, the shaking had been sufficient to take all the dignity from poor Hamlet, and he was straddling about his box as though intoxicated. Imagine the chagrin of the young artist, the horror, the mortification, at seeing his work thus disfigured. But he was nevertheless undaunted, and taking the box to the nearest seat, he knelt down on the grass and proceeded to make the prince once more presentable.

It was while he was with Foley that Mr. Williamson first met her Majesty. By some unfortunate accident the letter announcing the royal visit was delayed in delivery till a very short time before the Queen was due.



THE STUDIO STEPS.

Foley was out, and his wife was naturally thrown into a high state of excitement—the studio being in a dreadful muddle. Mr. Williamson came to the rescue, and between them they managed to make the place fairly orderly. To him, too, fell the lot of conducting the visitors round, and what an august party it was for the young sculptor to face! The Queen, the Prince Consort, the Princess Royal, the Prince of Wales, and several ladies of high degree in attendance. The ordeal was, however, gone through successfully, with but one exceptional incident, for on reaching after a figure from a shelf Mr. Williamson trod on the Prince Consort's toe and produced a royal frown. It is characteristic of the Queen that when, some years after, he was formally presented to her Majesty at Claremont, she quite remembered the visit to Foley's studio and the young pupil who acted the part of cicerone.

It was in 1847 that Mr. Williamson was articled to Foley, and when the seven years

were expired, he stayed on as assistant. It was not all plain sailing, for at one time Foley had not a single commission in hand, and his pupil had to purchase material to work upon out of his own pocket! The association was, however, maintained for twenty-one years, by which time Mr. Williamson was receiving and executing commissions on his own account. In the meantime—in 1857, to be exact—he had married, and established his home at Esher, and in 1870 he received his first commission from the Queen. He was introduced at Claremont by H.R.H. the Princess Louise, and was commanded to prepare designs for some memorial sculpture to the Princess Charlotte to be erected in the mausoleum at Claremont. These were so successful that the completed works were placed in Claremont House instead of the mausoleum.

Since then not a single year has passed without a royal commission being placed in his hands. The Prince and Princess of Wales are the only two members of the family who have not sat for him. The Queen has specially honoured him in this respect, for rarely has she given other artists more than two sittings for one portrait,

while Mr. Williamson has had as many as he deemed necessary. His principal representation of her Majesty is that which stands in the examination hall of the Royal College of Physicians, on the Victoria Embankment, which was proclaimed by the Prince of Wales when he unveiled it as "the finest portrait of the Queen ever produced." We are enabled to give an interesting photograph which shows this statue being cut from the marble block (p. 680). Mr. Williamson has produced a statuette of this figure, which is seen in the illustration on page 679. One of his last works is a replica of this statue for Rangoon; but as the Burmese wanted a more regal symbol than a fan, a sceptre takes the place of this appendage in their statue.

The Queen is an interesting sitter, but is most particular about the exact reproduction of the smallest details, and for this statue Mr. Williamson was lent the dress in which her Majesty is represented, so that no mistake might be made. Although she is short in stature, even for a woman—being only five

feet in height—she has a dignified bearing which fully atones for this.

A visit to Mr. Williamson's studio is a delightful experience. As the photographs of parts of it reproduced in this article show, the place is full of the evidences of a busy life. All around are busts, statues, and statuettes, many of them of men and women of note, and all of them of great interest. When it is said that he has executed 230 busts, besides many statues for public places and private collections, some idea of his unremitting toil may be formed.

Mr. Williamson is a portraitist *par excellence*, but he does not merely set himself to reproduce the features of his sitters; he infuses into the marble much of the character of the originals as well.

Near the entrance to the studio is a bust of the Right Hon. Arthur Balfour, executed when he held office some years ago. Innumerable difficulties beset the artist before he could complete the model. The sittings were obtained at the Government office, and although altogether there were fifteen given, the aggregate time only amounted to about an hour and a half. When Mr. Williamson thought he had secured

his subject for a good sitting, an interruption would occur—a deputation would have to be seen, or an important message replied to—and the opportunity was gone; yet the highly sensitive character of the statesman, and the intellectual features, are successfully represented in the bust. Near by is an extraordinary head, which appears perfectly flat at the back. It is that of the late Lord Coleridge. It was designed to stand in his library, in company with busts of Plato and other classicists, and was modelled in the same style.

The group of two boys shown in the illustration on page 677, is a delightful composition. The figures are portraits of the two sons of the late Lord Rosslyn; the lad on the right is the present holder of the title. The two girls represented as paddling in the sea (p. 676), are the daughters of Mr. Combe, the well-known brewer. There, too, are the striking feature of the late Rev. W. Rogers—a magnificent head for portraiture. It is well known that Mr. Rogers met with an accident when riding, by which his spine was injured; this caused him to stoop very much. Mr. Williamson noticed that when he drew himself into an erect position, he used to mutter between

THE LATE DUKE OF ALBANY.

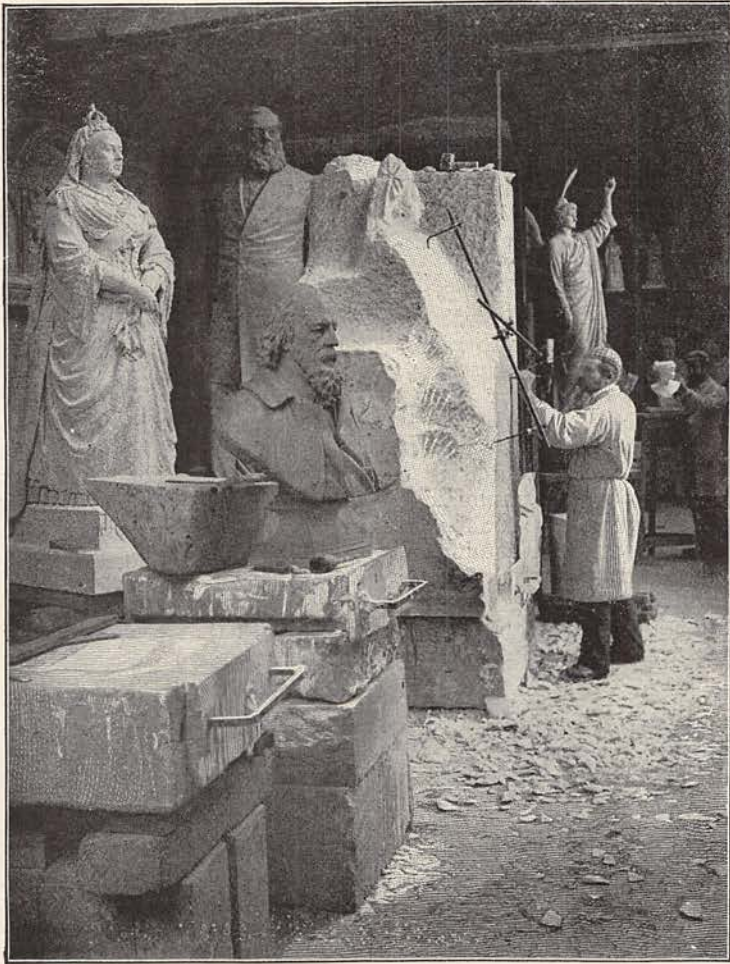


THE LATE DUKE OF CLARENCE.

PRINCESS ALICE OF ALBANY.

THE DUKE OF YORK.

A ROYAL GROUP.



THE CLAY MODEL AND THE MARBLE BLOCK FOR MR. WILLIAMSON'S STATUE OF THE QUEEN.

his teeth "Dogs!" He felt very curious to know the reason why, and once ventured to ask. "Well," said Mr. Rogers, "it does as well as any other expletive, doesn't it?"

The bust of Lord Tennyson, which appeared in the Royal Academy in 1894, was executed after the death of the Laureate, and was a special commission from the Queen. A replica was afterwards done for the Corporation of London. It is a wonderful head, with an extraordinary depth of forehead. The most interesting objects in this gallery of celebrities, however, are the representations of royal personages which are so plentiful. The illustration on page 679 shows the principal of them. A melancholy interest attaches to the figure of the little baby in the front of the group; it is the little Princess Alice—the daughter of the late Duke of

Albany. Mr. Williamson was asked by the Duchess to execute it, as a surprise birthday-present for the Duke. It was a difficult matter to keep the secret, for the Duke used to look in at the studio at all sorts of unexpected times. Before the model was finished he discovered the plot, by recognising the figure of his little daughter. He was surprised, and pleased, and thereafter watched its progress with increasing delight. But—alas!—before it was finished, the grim hand of death was laid upon the father, and he never saw the completion of the work. By command of the Queen, the marble was finished, and exhibited at the Royal Academy. It is now in Claremont House. It may be mentioned that a statuette, similar in design to this, was done of Prince Edward of York, and was executed as a surprise Christmas

present for the Duke, his father. The clay model was being worked upon in the studio when the writer of this paper visited it, and the finished work, which is illustrated below, is in the Royal Academy.

In the studio is the model of the well-known statue of Sister Dora, which stands at Walsall to commemorate the work of that heroine. When it was erected, it had the unique interest of being the only statue of a woman, other than royal personages, in the country. Another interesting statuette is one of Robert Burns—and upon that hangs a tale. Mr. Williamson was invited to compete for a statue of the poet for the town of Ayr. He entered into it with enthusiasm, finished the model, and sent it off. It was adjudged the most successful; but—alas!—to the honour of the Committee, it was discovered that the artist was not a Scotsman! The flaw was fatal, and the design was not accepted—for the competition had been limited to natives of the Land-o'-Cakes. The Committee had jumped to the conclusion that, as Mr. Williamson bore a Scottish name, he must of necessity be an over-Borderman—hence the invitation. The statuette was returned, and the award duly made to a *bonâ-fide* Scot.

Curious are the commissions a sculptor is offered. There is a charming, chubby-faced head of a baby, worked up from another child who bore a likeness to the subject and from the mother's description of her darling, and yet

the portrait was so good as to be recognised by a visitor to the studio who knew the original.

When the Jubilee coinage was issued, Mr. Williamson received a letter from a gentleman—a stranger to him—who said he had watched his work with great interest at the Exhibitions, but after the monstrosities he had perpetrated on the new coins he could no longer honour him. The reply was sent that the writer was labouring under a mistake, Mr. Williamson was altogether guiltless of the crime imputed to him. Apologies followed, and, as a return for the baseless charge made against him, would Mr. Williamson model a bust of the writer's wife?

"Certainly," was the answer; "when could he have sittings?"

"Oh, she is dead!" was the response. And the work had to be done from a photograph. Satisfaction was expressed, and a commission for the writer's bust followed.

But probably the most curious example of Mr. Williamson's work may be seen in Esher Churchyard. There, on an ornate tomb, are the recumbent effigies of a living man and his wife. These are no other than Lord Esher—the genial Master of the Rolls—and Lady Esher. The tomb is really a memorial of their son, who lost his life in the Egyptian Campaign, but this peculiar form of monument was the deliberate choice of Lord Esher. The Master of the Rolls is represented in his official wig and gown.

ARTHUR FISH.



H. R. H. PRINCE EDWARD OF YORK.  
(Exhibited at the Royal Academy.)