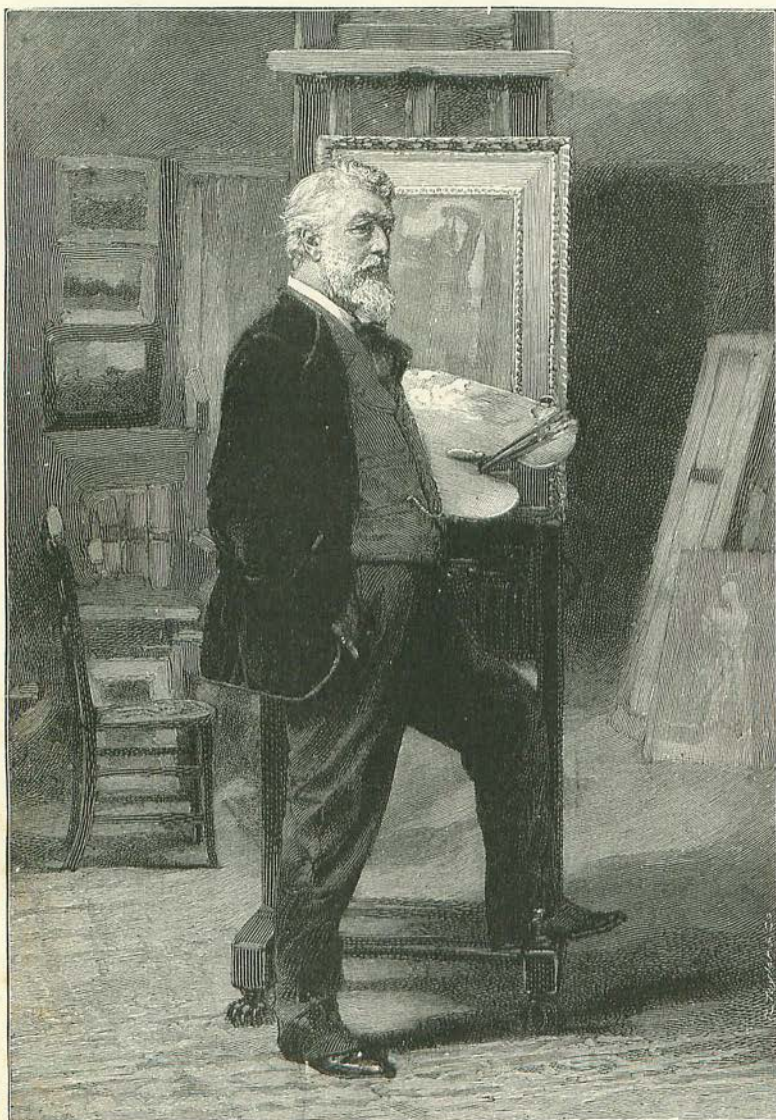


*Illustrated Interviews.*

No. XIV.—SIR FREDERICK LEIGHTON, P.R.A.



*From a Photo. by]*

SIR FREDERICK LEIGHTON AT HIS EASEL.

*[Elliott & Fry.*

**N**OT a sound reaches me here, save the singing of the birds," said Sir Frederick Leighton, as we stood for a moment in the garden of his beautiful house in the Holland Park-road, Kensington. It seemed to be a little world of its own. There was nothing whatever to disturb one's thoughts on this day of sunshine, when the flowers about

the lawn were looking their brightest and best, the great trees and tiny trailing ivy greener to-day than ever before. We knew the children were playing in the street, a few yards away, but their merry shouts and happy laughter could not be heard. The surroundings of the home of the President of the Royal Academy almost suggested the secret of the peaceful effect which seems to come over one when looking at many of his pictures.

We crossed the lawn, walked down a long leafy passage covered with ivy, and once again entered the house. I do not think there is another home in the land so beautiful as Sir Frederick's. It is the home of an artist, who must needs have everything about the place to harmonise as the colours he lays upon his canvases.

Sir Frederick is justly proud of his house. He does not care even to look back upon his own life, a life which has been one of remarkable brilliancy, a life which he has lived with a purpose; he is to-day at the head of his profession, a profession for which he was destined on his first birthday. Not only has his genius been conveyed through the channel of his brush and palette, but as a scholar and a thinker he impresses to the highest degree those whose good fortune it is to enjoy his friendship or acquaintance. Neither will he criticise the efforts of his brother artists save in terms of praise; neither will he speak of the life which he personifies—Art—a subject too great, he says, to be faithfully treated in the space in which I was to chronicle the events of the day which I passed with him. He turns from his life, his brother artists, and art

itself to his home. He loves his home. His house was not designed in a day or built in a year. It has been the work of years; bit by bit it has become more beautiful; its owner has watched it grow up almost as a father does his boy.

The house itself stands in a spot surrounded by many eminent painters; Luke Fildes, R.A., Val Prinsep, A.R.A., G. A. Watts, R.A.; whilst near at hand, in one of the studios adjoining, the younger Richmond, the eminent portrait painter, is working. Outside, the house, which is of red brick, is striking in its simplicity; it was built for Sir Frederick by Mr. Aitchison twenty-six years ago, and here the President of the Royal Academy has lived and worked ever since. Possibly the unimpressive aspect of the exterior was designed with a view of surprising the visitor when he once entered the place. The interior positively surpasses description. I had the great privilege of being taken from room to room by Sir Frederick Leighton; object after object was taken up and talked about, and it would be quite impossible to refer separately to all the artistic treasures of which he is the pos-



From a Photo. by

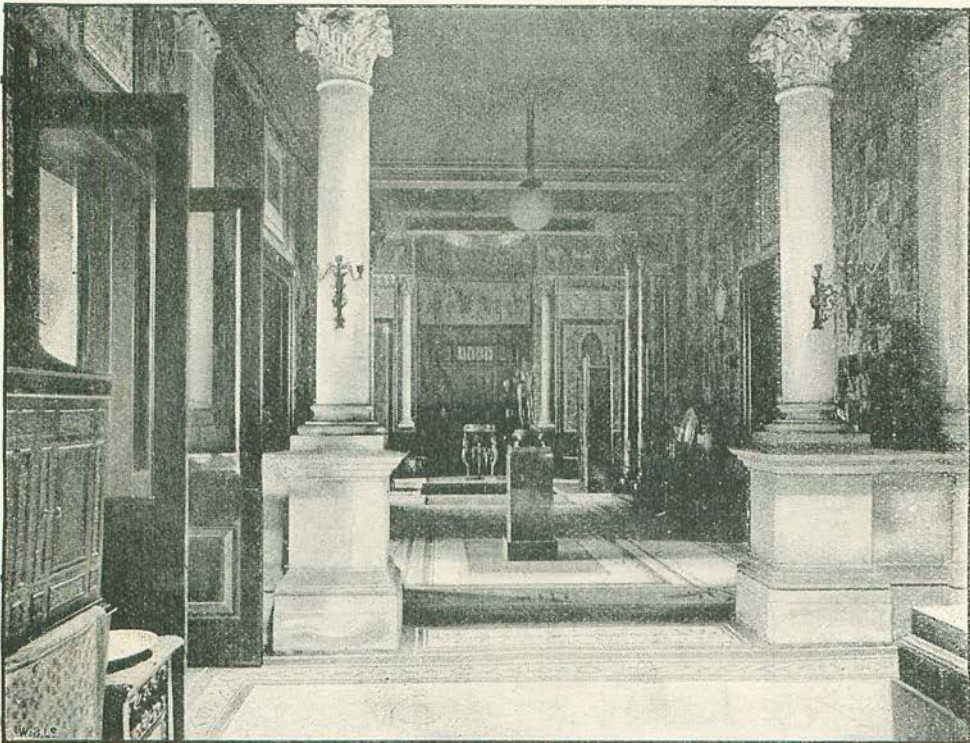
ARABIAN COURT—ENTRANCE.

[Elliott & Fry.

essor, the beauties of which were most enthusiastically dilated upon.

Entering from the street, you find yourself in a small hall. Though of the most artistic design, this, too, I fancy, is yet another blind for what lies beyond. In this hall stands a bronze statuette of Icarus, by Mr. Gilbert, A.R.A., executed for Sir Frederick. A few steps more through a solid-looking black ebony door picked out with gold (all the doors of the house are similar) and we enter the Arabian Court. Sir Frederick's Arabian Court is simply a creation; one can only stand and listen to the splashing of the fountain falling beneath

the sweetest of strains glide across the smooth plaques; if Aladdin himself were to enter bearing on his back his burden of precious stones. It is the very spot to which you would come to find all this. Sir Frederick pointed out to me the Damascus, Persian, and Rhodian ware which is liberally scattered about. The delicate woodwork is from Cairo, the exquisite mosaics are by Walter Crane; the blue tiles are among the first De Morgan ever did, and the capitals of the columns are carved with various birds by the late Sir Edgar Boehm. The only thing which has not been brought from some Eastern country is some very



*From a Photo. by*

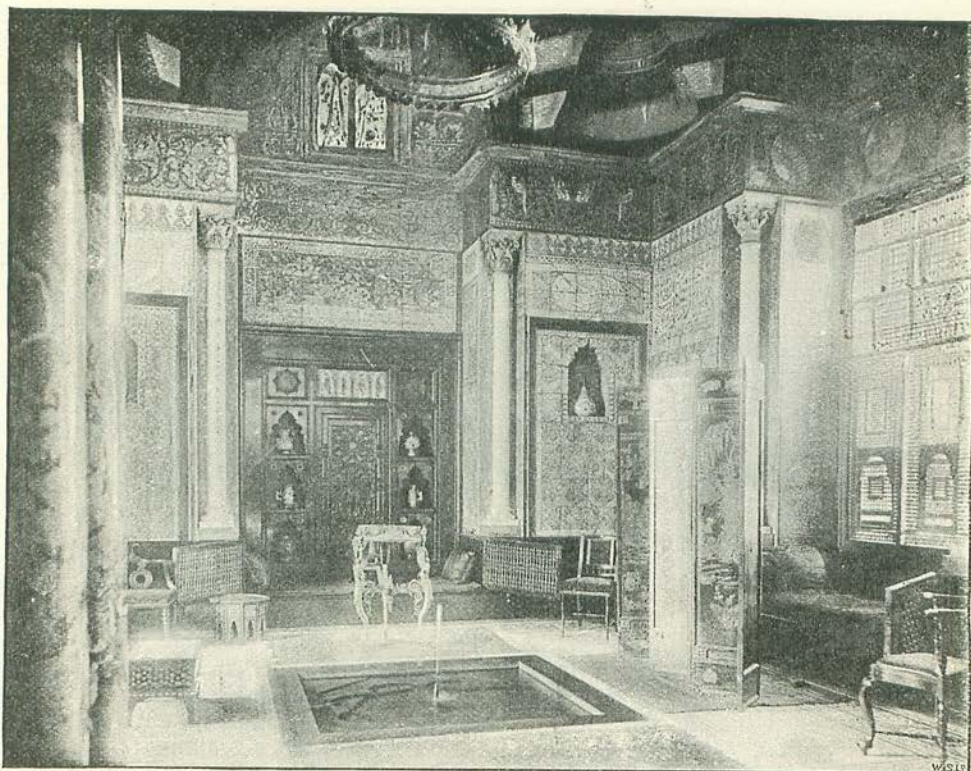
THE ARABIAN COURT.

*[Elliott & Fry.]*

the golden dome at the far end of the court, and conjure up recollections of the fairest of scenes and grandest of palaces described in the Arabian Nights. We are in Kensington; but as one stands there it would not come as the least surprise if the Court were suddenly crowded with the most beautiful of Eastern women reclining on the softest of silken cushions in the niches in the corners; if the wildest and most fascinating dancers of the Arabian Nights were to come tripping in, and to the sound of

quaint candelabra exhibited in Old London at one of the South Kensington Exhibitions.

Walking down to the far end of this bewildering spot I stand beneath the great gilt dome, and the sun which is shining causes it to sparkle with a thousand gems. On looking up, the dome seems to lose itself far away, so delicate and ingenious is the construction and the colouring of it. It is a place in which to sit down and dream, for there is not a sound except the



From a Photo. by]

"BENEATH THE GREAT GILT DOME."

[Elliott &amp; Fry.

gentle splashing of the spray from the fountain. The fountain itself is hewn out of one solid block of black marble. It comes to one's memory that this spot has been more than once the scene of many amusing incidents. Sir Frederick's friends, in going through the court, frequently, when gazing at the beautiful ceiling, unconsciously walk into the water.

The study is to the left of the entrance hall. Here on the walls hang some exquisite heads by Legros, drawings by Alfred Stevens, and a number of etchings; choice specimens of mediæval ware fill odd corners, and here, too, almost hidden away from view, is an engraving of Old Burlington House, showing very different surroundings to those of 1892—the fields are away in the distance, waggons drawn by half a dozen horses are passing, and coaches heavily laden are driving past.

The dining and drawing-rooms are on the opposite side of the court. Both of them look out on the garden, and adjoin each other. The walls of the former are of dark Indian red. The Rhodian and Damascus plates, which are set out in single file from the ceiling to the floor, are very

numerous. A fine work by Schiavone hangs over the great oaken fireplace, and on either side of the hearth are a pair of quaint Arabian chairs ingeniously fitted with looking-glasses on their backs and arms.

The drawing-room is a very delightful apartment. The colour of the walls is of a delicate nut brown, while the ceiling is pure white. There is a recess which opens out on to the garden, and set in the ceiling of this is a magnificent study by Delacroix for a ceiling in the Palais Royal. More plates are upon the walls, and curios and priceless nick-nacks of all descriptions and from all countries are upon the tables. The pictures are all oil colours. Sir Frederick is pardonably proud of possessing four panels by Corot, which he regards as the finest this artist ever painted. They hang in pairs, two on each side of the recess, and their subjects are "Morning," "Noon," "Evening," and "Night." "Wetley Rocks" is the title given to the first picture painted by George Mason after he settled in England. There is yet another Corot, a David Cox, and a couple of Constables. One of the Constables is the original palette-knife sketch for the



From a Photo. by]

THE STUDY.

[Elliott &amp; Fry.

leading to the studio many rare works of art are met with. Here hangs a copy of Michael Angelo's "Creation of Adam," while near it is an unfinished canvas by Sir Joshua Reynolds; though unfinished, it is, in reality, a very valuable possession, as it is a silent witness to the fact that Sir Joshua never outlined his figures with a pencil, but used the brush from the beginning.

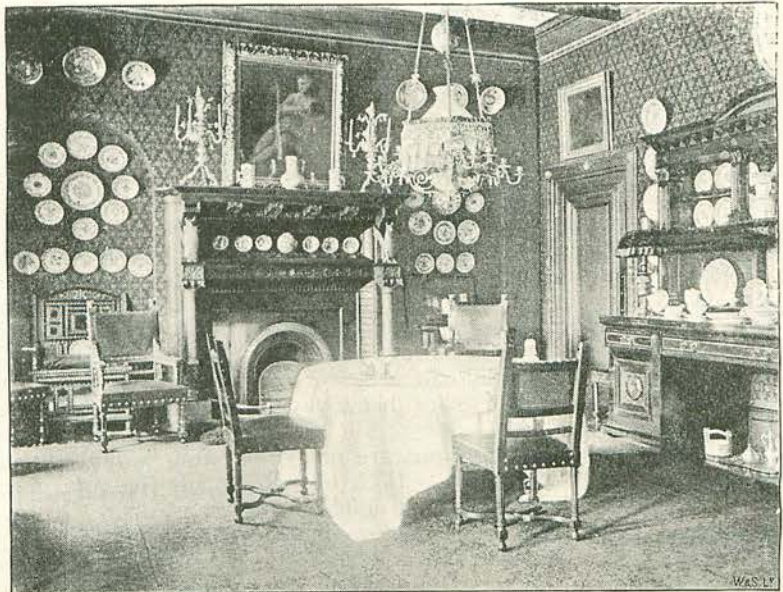
"Hay-wain." The canvas—for which this was the first sketch—was sent to Paris, gaining a gold medal, and at the same time causing an immense sensation in the French capital. Landscape painting at that period was not understood; heavy historical subjects were in fashion, and it was considered a daring thing for an artist to paint nature in its simplicity, as seen in the green meadows and fields. Sir Frederick expressed the opinion that the simple little canvas of the "Hay-wain" revolutionised the French school of painting.

Passing again into the hall, one notices a stuffed peacock which figured in one of the great artist's pictures. The beautiful colouring of the feathers of this bird led Sir Frederick to give it a prominent place in the most noticeable part of his house.

On the stairs

The picture represents Lord Rockingham with Burke, his secretary, and the face of the latter is barely suggested.

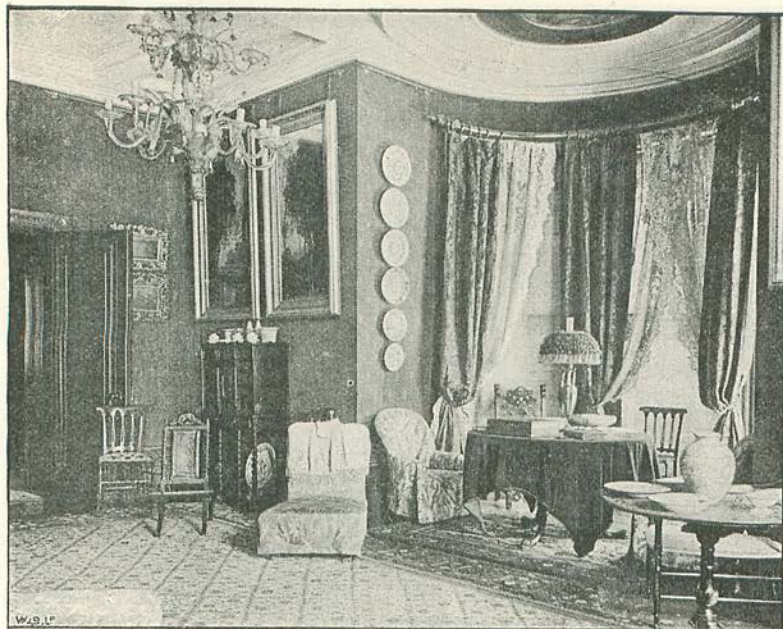
At the top of the staircase is a delightful little antechamber. Walking to the end of this you may look through a screen made of wood brought from Cairo and see the fountain playing down below. This spot also affords a closer view of the exquisite workmanship which has been put into the



From a Photo. by]

THE DINING-ROOM.

[Elliott &amp; Fry.



From a Photo. by]

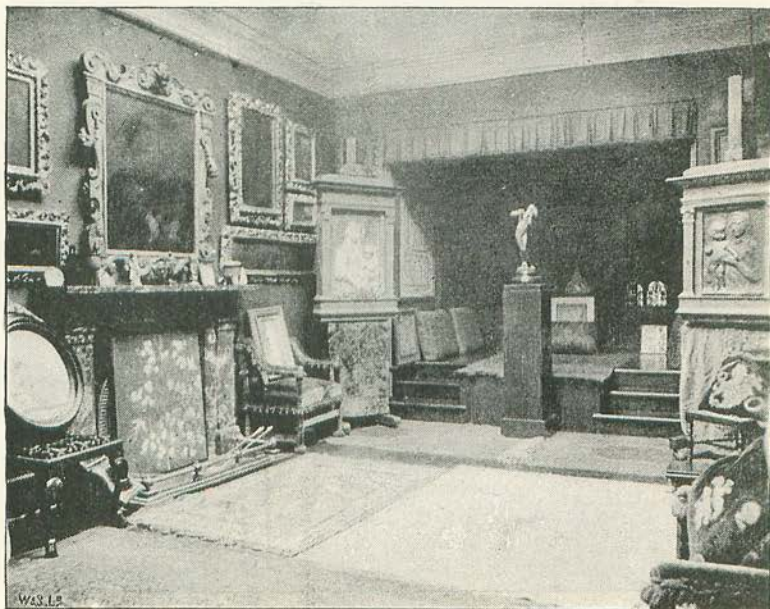
THE DRAWING-ROOM.

[Elliott &amp; Fry.

dome. There are many fine works here, notably the original sketch for the "Needless Alarm," which Sir Frederick gave to Sir John Millais, who, in return, presented him with that charming work "Shelling Peas." Paolo Paruta, the Venetian historian, painted by Tintoretto, is also here, besides a head of Bassano and another example of Schiavone.

Now Sir Frederick leads the way into the great studio—his workshop. It is one of the biggest studios in London. It would take a dozen pages to chronicle everything that it contains. The walls are covered with tiny sketches done by the artist whilst travelling; scenes of Rome, the Nile, Rhodes, Jerusalem, Athens, Seville, Algiers, and other picturesque spots in-

opposite the entrance is the studio window, which is of large proportions and affords a magnificent light for painting. Set out in the recess of the window are objects every single one of which is worth noting. Here are studies for the "Daphnephoria"—the boy carrying the tripod, the man beating time to the music



W&amp;S.L.S.

From a Photo. by]

THE ANTE-CHAMBER.

[Elliott &amp; Fry.

viting to the artist all find their place, and amongst the beautiful studies of the Continent are mingled the daintiest of views of the scenery of our own country: the valleys of Devonshire, the glorious green slopes of Ireland, the mountains of Scotland and of Wales. On the south side of the studio, running along the top, is a portion of the famous Elgin frieze. Immediately

of the procession, and many other figures introduced into that most remarkable work; a sketch for the "Sluggard," and a tiny model in plaster of the trio of beautiful maidens which form the subject of one of his Academy pictures for this year, "The Garden of the Hesperides."

I asked Sir Frederick to tell me something about his studies for his pictures. I learnt that they were numberless.

He is constantly making little play-sketches—hundreds of them in the course of a year; many of them may never be used, yet every one may come in useful at some time. He carefully preserves all these studies—he still has stored away the little book in which he used to draw as a boy when he was nine years of age. He is continually finding little sketches he made years ago coming



From a photo. by

UNDER THE STUDIO WINDOW.

[Elliott & Fry

in for pictures to-day. Sir Frederick took from a portfolio some of these studies. They were done on pieces of brown paper; one of these was for a Sibyl; two others were the first studies for two of the maidens in the "Garden of the Hesperides," and yet two more which were prominent figures in his famous work "Andromache." Some of these are reproduced in these pages.

There are quite a number of easels about with works upon them which are still in progress.

"Here is a very beautiful drawing by Gainsborough," said Sir Frederick, taking down from the wall one of the familiar Gainsborough women, with the equally familiar Gainsborough hat and feathers, which any modern woman would envy. "It was a study for a picture he painted for George III.



From a Photo. by

THE CORRIDOR.

[Elliott & Fry.



From a Photo. by]

THE STUDIO.

[Elliott &amp; Fry.

called 'The Mall.' Gainsborough was walking along the Mall one day when he saw and was attracted by the lady in the picture. She perceived that the artist was attempting to draw her portrait, and very carefully walked to and fro in order to give him every facility for making a likeness. Sir Thomas Lawrence used to come and look at this study when he was painting Miss Farren for Lord Derby."

We were now looking at a very old engraving of the Exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1777; it bears the autograph of the Prince of Wales, who presented it to Sir Frederick. Sir Frederick merrily points out an inscription on it in Greek which he translates, "Let no one enter who is not a lover of the Muse." "Rather curious, that inscription," he says; "for if you look at the picture you will see two

dogs coming in at the door! The engraving represents Sir Joshua Reynolds as President of the Royal Academy, showing the Prince of Wales and the Royal Family through the great room of the Exhibition. I may tell you that it is customary for the President to take any members of the Royal Family round when they signify their intention of visiting Burlington House. His Royal Highness saw this picture in Paris, and immediately said, pointing to the figure of Sir Joshua, 'Why, that is Leighton showing me round the Royal Academy.' So he graciously gave me the engraving."

Passing from the great studio through a small corridor furnished with ebony book-shelves and large pieces of canvas, and drawing the great plush curtains on one side, we enter the winter studio. Here

the great artist paints when the light of the larger room is not sufficiently strong. A magnificent Persian carpet hangs on the wall. Here, too, is the picture, already referred to, of a girl shelling peas, the inscription on which reads, "To Sir Frederick Leighton from John Edward Millais, March 7, 1889." A great cross of wood near at hand tells that Sir Frederick will shortly be engaged on a work suggestive of the Crucifixion.

In a corner of the room, set out on a black ebony table, are great jars from far-off lands crowded with brushes. Many artistic "props" lie in this little studio. Here I found a tiny wreath of everlasting flowers, a golden lyre, tambourines, and many other things. The golden lyre is the one seen in the "Garden of the Hesperides"; the tambourine and wreath of





DRAWING FOR THE PICTURE OF "ANDROMACHE."

flowers figure in another of the Academy pictures, whilst here is a pretty little stuffed antelope, which formed a part of another work in this year's exhibition.

Together we returned to the great studio, and, sitting down, Sir Frederick recalled many interesting reminiscences in his career.

The appearance of the President of the Royal Academy is familiar to all. In spite of his sixty-one years he is still one of the handsomest of men. His hair is quite silver, and his features are as perfect and as distinctive as those in his own pictures. He speaks very softly, with combined gentleness and deliberation. His heart is evidently in every subject upon which he converses. When we remember the numerous duties attached to the office of the Presidency of the Royal Academy, he may almost be regarded as one of the hardest worked men in London. He is in his studio by half-past eight every morning, and previous to that hour he has had his first breakfast, glanced through *The Times*, opened his letters, and read for three-quarters of an hour besides. He works on his Academy pictures up to the very last moment, and when painting wears a pair of large spectacles with divided glasses, the upper part of the glasses being used for seeing

his model at a distance, and the lower for painting. These he has worn for the



STUDY FOR "ANDROMACHE."

last ten years, although there is practically nothing the matter with his eyes. He is a most accomplished linguist, and at his Sunday "At Homes," where there are sometimes representatives of many nationalities and tongues at his house, he will converse with them all one after the other in their own language. His

kindness of heart is proverbial; he never fails to encourage; and he is refined geniality itself. As an instance of his kindly spirit for everybody, a capital story is told: On the occasion of a Royal Academy Exhibition the President was walking down the stairs of his house in full dress, on which two medals were displayed, to his carriage, when, wishing to enter a small room in the vicinity, he found that the door was locked. It seems that his housekeeper, who had only been with him a few days, had hid herself in the little room with a view to catching sight of Sir Frederick departing for the Royal Academy. On opening the door she nearly fell into his arms. Sir Frederick happily realised the situation, and in the most

genial manner possible turned himself round and round, and laughingly asked his housekeeper what she thought of him.

Sir Frederick Leighton's birth took place at Scarborough on December 3, 1830. There seems to be some little doubt as to which was the house in which this very interesting event took place. One thing is certain, that it was situated in Brunswick-terrace. A large private hotel and boarding-house has been erected on the old site. It seems that the old building was not entirely de-

molished, but the present one was built over it, the walls of several of the rooms being utilised as they stood. The lady who owns the hotel has stated that when her late husband purchased the place, they were given to understand that Sir Frederick was born in No. 1 room. The next-door neighbour, however, claimed for his house the

honour of being connected with Sir Frederick. They determined to decide the dispute some years ago by an appeal to the great artist himself, and wrote to him accordingly. He was, however, unable to definitely locate the place of his birth, and so both houses still claim the distinction.

At a very early age the future President of the Royal Academy evinced a strong talent for painting. It is a curious fact that whilst both his father and grandfather were doctors, and many other members of his family were talented in music, with the one exception of his mother's brother none of his relations showed any aptitude for drawing. His parents never for a moment doubted his qualifications for an artist, even at this

early age; they simply declined to trust their own judgment in allowing their boy to follow art as a profession. Still, little Leighton never lost an opportunity of using his pencil. Every facility was given to him to follow out his inclinations, and his father, being a medical man, naturally saw that his son was well instructed in anatomy. At ten years of age his family went to Rome, and Sir Frederick began taking lessons from Signor Meli, but it was not until he was fourteen, when in



A STUDY FOR A FIGURE IN "ANDROMACHE."

Florence, that his future career was decided upon. His father said to him :

"Now, Fred, give me a number of your designs, and I will take them to Mr. Powers," referring to Hiram Powers, the celebrated American sculptor. "If he says that you will be a distinguished artist, all well and good. If not, you must give up the idea."

His father took some sketches, including a great battle-scene suggested by one of Macaulay's poems.

"And what is the verdict, Mr. Powers?" asked Mr. Leighton. "Shall I make him an artist?"

The reply was: "You can't help yourself, sir; Nature has done it for you."

"Will he be an eminent artist?" then asked Mr. Leighton.

The answer was: "Sir, your son can be as eminent as he pleases."

This settled the whole question, and the youthful artist from that day was allowed free course in the matter.

"I have a slight recollection of my first drawing master," said Sir Frederick. "While at Rome I remember saying to my father, 'I want to learn drawing.' 'All right,' was the reply, 'go and get a master.' I made inquiries, obtained the address of a man, went to him and engaged him. I remember he was very much amused when he found that I knew how to write down his name and address; but he gave me most careful attention, and outline drawings to copy. He was very firm; if he did not like my copy he used to put three strokes across it, and make me do it again."

Young Leighton then studied in the Academy at Berlin, then at Frankfort-on-

Main, and afterwards went to Brussels, where he painted his first important picture, representing Cimabue finding Giotto drawing in the fields. So years passed on in studying in Paris, copying pictures in the Louvre, and returning again to Frankfort. The first picture which told Englishmen of the genius of Sir Frederick was "Cimabue's Procession," exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1855.

"I shall never forget packing that picture up to send it to England," said Sir Frederick: "I was in Rome at the time. I found some of the colours on the canvas were quite wet, but I risked it; and, taking some varnish with a brush, I went for my picture. It was still so wet that the paint came off by touching it with a handkerchief. However, it arrived in England as sound as a rock, and the Queen bought it immediately it was exhibited."

It was in Rome that Thackeray, whilst Leighton's name was

barely known in England, wrote to Millais and told him that he had met a "versatile young dog who will run you hard for the presidentship one day." With the advent of "Cimabue's Procession" his fame was established and his genius at once recognised. He did not, however, come to England for four years after his first great success. From the time he settled in this country up to the present day every picture that he has painted has called for diligent study from the public. He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1864, and an Academician in 1869. He became President in succession to Sir



STUDY FOR A SIBYL.

Francis Grant on November 13, 1878. In that year the French Exhibition was held, and he was made President of the British section there, and received the Legion of Honour.

"The first statue I did," said Sir Frederick, "was that of an athlete wrestling with a python. The little sketch for this I merely did casually. It took but a short time to model, and there was no question of exhibiting it. But one or two friends saw the model, amongst them Legros, who remarked, 'Why not carry it out on a larger scale?' I laughed, thinking I should not be able to manage it, but finally succeeded. It occupied a couple of years in completing, working on it occasionally. It was eventually bought under the Chantry bequest, sent to Paris, and got a first-class gold medal and diploma. I also did the 'Sluggard' and 'Needless Alarm.'"

Seeing that Sir Frederick always declines to express himself on any great artistic subject in the haphazard way in which we were chatting together, I contented myself with asking him one or two questions on the very simple topics of canvases, colours, models and methods of working.

"I never give my whole attention to one picture at the same time," said Sir Frederick; "I invariably have six or seven canvases going, and I find it gives me all the rest I need to go from one to the other, working a little bit here and a little bit there. By this means the eye is constantly refreshed; I get through a good deal of work by this system. I have no special models, and there is no model who sits

to me alone. Models are constantly ringing at my side door, anxious to become engaged, just as they do at the doors of other studios. The faces I paint are never the faces of my models; what the artist puts on the canvas is the impression which the model produces upon him—what he feels inwardly, and not what he sees before him. Yes, I am very devoted to drapery, and invariably use a certain kind of muslin for dresses. In a picture the colour of a garment is an invention on the part of the artist, and not a copy of the colour of any fabric. It is quite a mistake to imagine that we take a garment out of a cupboard and paint it; it is simply used for getting the form and folds; the colour is conceived. I consider that the colours used to-day, if properly prepared, ought to be far better and much more durable than those of the past. In the days of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Wilkie, during the reign of asphaltum, a colour used very largely then but now quite out of use, the pictures suffered very much. Although I have been painting in oils exactly fifty years, I have only had one

single accident happen with a pigment."

Sir Frederick Leighton seldom paints portraits. He considers it "fetters one down, as you are simply bound to satisfy your subject." He cannot work under restraint, neither can he use his brush whilst being watched; he could not touch a canvas with his most intimate friend by his side looking on. He likes to work with a large palette, and by preference with one of lemon-coloured wood.



SIR FREDERICK LEIGHTON, P.R.A.  
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.

HARRY HOW.