

Luca Fildes, R.A.

THE DOCTOR.

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From the Picture by]

Illustrated Interviews.

XXV.—MR. LUKE FILDES, R.A.



MELBURY ROAD, Kensington, has for some years past been completely converted into a colony of eminent artists and sculptors in general, and R.A.'s in particular. Pedestrians sel-

dom pass by that way. It is a corner of London which the birds seem to have singled out as a fitting place for early and impromptu concerts—a Kensingtonian nook, where the flowers

bloom and the trees are positively patriotic towards our sister isle in a constant "wearing of the green."

It is altogether an ideal spot for the artist. One house in the Melbury Road cannot fail to cause both eyes to "take it in." You cannot mistake it. It stands next to a habitation of the Norman period. It is of red brick, and its windows are brimming over with scarlet geraniums and marguerites. It is of Queen Anne design, and bears visible marks of the skill of Nor-

man Shaw, who designed it some sixteen years ago. But, then, there are many other "Queen Annes" in Melbury Road. Still, there is no mistaking it; for if you listen at the gate you may sometimes hear little voices. You cannot see the owners of them, for they are playing about on the lawn at the back, and hidden by evergreens and bushy shrubs.

"Phyllis! Phyllis! if you're not quick you'll miss this butterfly."

"Is it a big one, Dorothy?"

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"Yes—there—there it goes!" and you hear a delightful shriek go up, and you feel you would part with all your small earthly possessions if you could but laugh as happily as that. You were just then listening to the two little daughters of Luke Fildes, R.A.

The true chord of a genial spirit is struck immediately you meet the Royal Academician. He looks exactly what he is—an artist. Tall, well-built, with expressive fea-

tures, and eyes that never fail to gather in "life"—he is undeniably handsome. His beard and moustache are brown, his hair black, and tinged with the very faintest sign of silver on the way. He talks to you earnestly, as though he considered that nothing should be said or uttered without thought. Every word, with him, has its due weight and value. Yet, notwithstanding this wise and commendable seriousness, there is a jollity of disposition, a

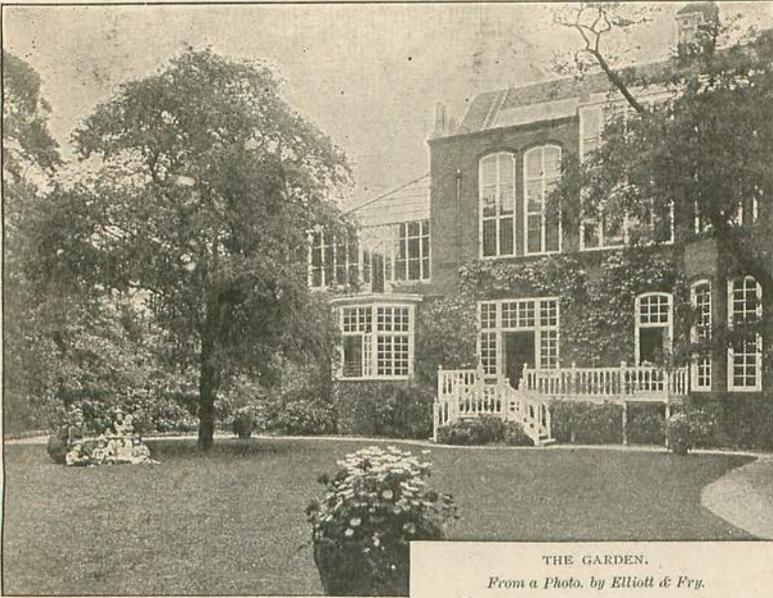


From a Photo. by]

MR. LUKE FILDES, R.A.

[Elliott & Fry.

keen appreciation of the merry side of things always apparent. That he is in love with his work is unquestionable, but the studio—and only an artist knows its fascinations—has not severed him from home ties. His wife is his constant companion. She will spend hours with him in the studio. Mrs. Fildes is herself an admirable artist; hence her advice and criticism on an important detail of work are often of the greatest value. The children, too. There are four boys—Val, a godson of Mr.



THE GARDEN.

From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.

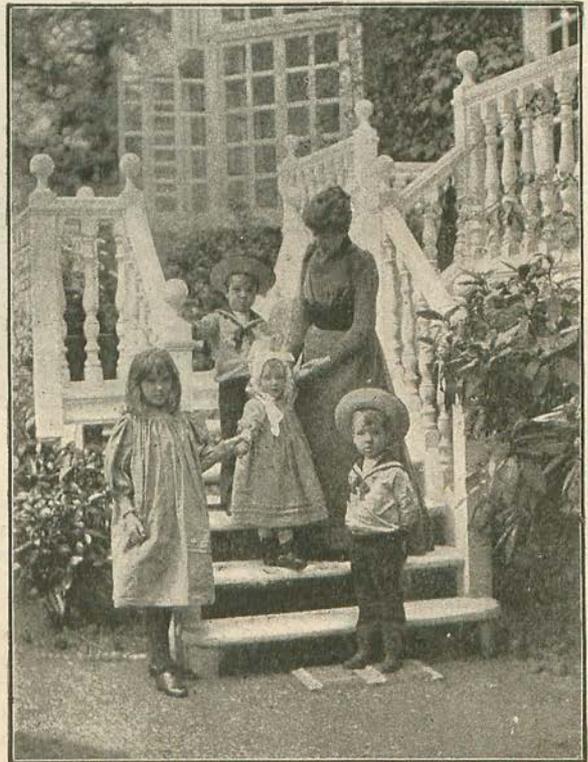
Val Prinsep, Paul, Geoffrey, and Dennis; and two little girls, of whom we have heard before. The two youngest boys and the girls are still at home, and lead a life of homely happiness. I like to weigh results from natural causes. Perhaps the helpful aid of wife and the pleasures of childhood, allowed a free and unfettered course, have something to do with the fact that Mr. Luke Fildes looks ten years younger than he really is!

His home is that of the artist—everything has its own artistic place and corner; nothing fails to harmonize, nothing comes short of gaining the effect wanted. It is a cosy and compact hall you enter. The walls are encrusted with crimson and gold. Engravings after Sir Joshua Reynolds are in abundance—Penelope, Lavina, Simplicity, the Countess Spencer, and many more. A quaint old Venetian lantern finds a place amongst knick-knacks in blue china, and here it may be said that Mr. Fildes has an exquisite collection of blue china scattered throughout the house. He had a hobby for collecting it before he was married, and they range from the tiniest of vases to heavy and massive jars. Here hangs the only framed original “black and white” in the house—an illustration for Victor Hugo’s

“L’Homme Qui Rit.”

Passing beneath the crimson curtains, on either side of which are proofs after Marcus Stone, R.A., you reach the body of the house. Brass plates from Venice line the staircase in delightful negligence. They are all over the house, intermingled with blue china and other ware. Immediately facing you is a magnificent pear-wood cabinet of Italian workmanship. The

school-room is to the left. Specimens of the work of the artist, whose children occupy this apartment, are not missing; and the drawing-room is right before you. It is a



From a Photo. by]

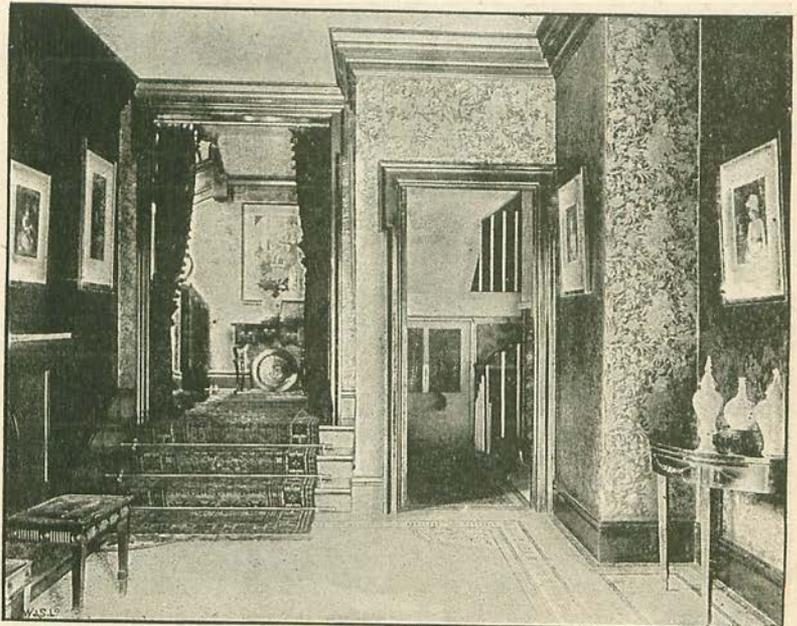
MRS. FILDÉS AND CHILDREN.

[Elliott & Fry.

room filled with the perfume of flowers: for not only are the vases filled with them, but the scent comes in through the open balcony door from the garden. From here you may now catch sight of the happy hunting ground of the little heroines of the butterfly adventure. The entire back of the garden is shut in by trees. The great green lawn, the gravel walks, the ivy and Virginia creeper trailing up the balcony

and trying to fight their way into the drawing-room, and absolute quietude, take one mile from a noisy metropolis.

The white ceiling of this apartment and the golden bronze on the walls produce a beautiful effect. The Chippendale furniture is very fine, the chairs being upholstered in plush of a glorious blue. A cabinet near the window contains the early playthings of the



From a Photo. by]

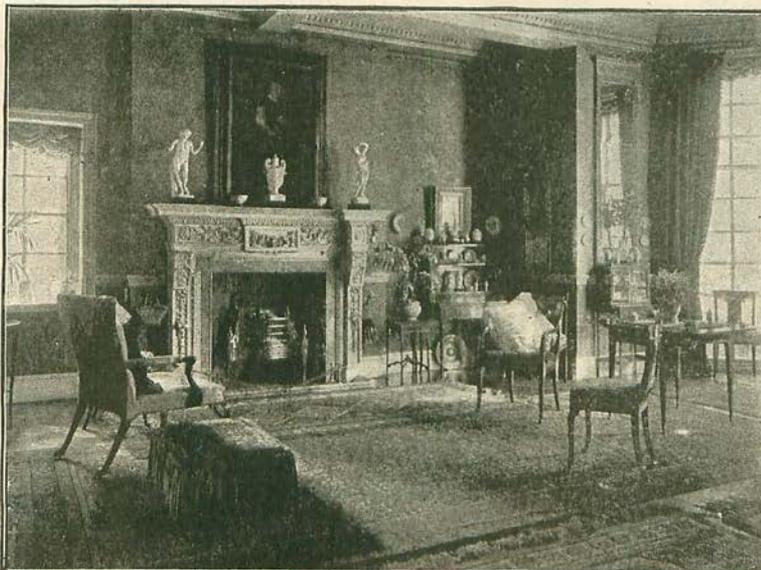
THE HALL.

[Elliott & Fry.

little ones—the silver bells on coral stems and silver christening mugs. Over the mantelpiece hangs a portion of a canvas of the Maroni period. The figure of a boy is shown with a hand resting on his shoulder. The owner of the hand has disappeared. The original sketch for Mr. Fildes' "Betty" is given a prominent place, and a delicate etching after Corot. David Murray, A.R.A., and

Henry Woods, R.A., are well represented; and a piece of convent needlework, purchased in Venice, is pointed out for its striking selection and beautiful blending of the silken threads employed in its making.

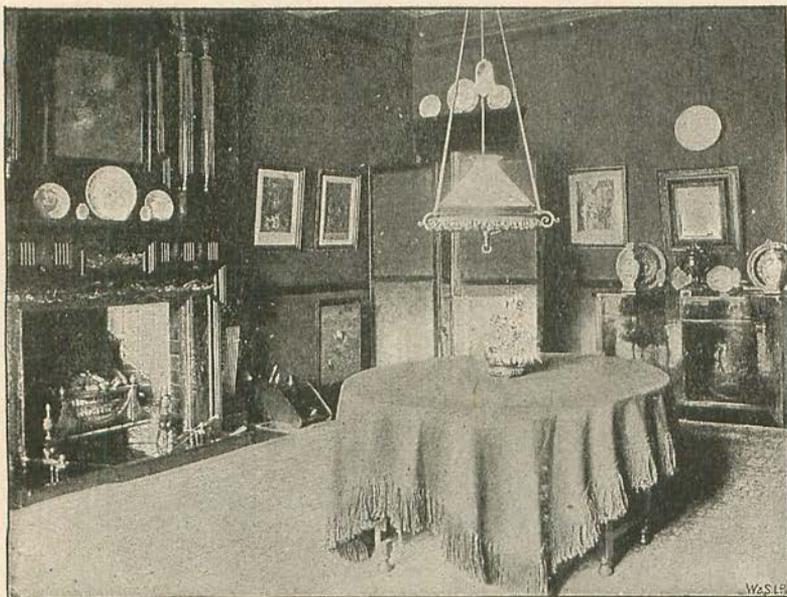
We pass through the dining-room on our way to the nursery. The pictures here are the famous French series of Rubens in the Louvre, which include "L'Éducation de la Reine," "La Reine prendre le parti de la Paix," "La Conclusion de



From a Photo. by]

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

[Elliott & Fry.



From a Photo. by]

THE DINING-ROOM.

[Elliott & Fry.

la Paix," "La Félicité de la Régence," etc. The prevailing tone of this room is Indian red, and the furniture—mostly Chippendale — corresponds to perfection.

What is unquestionably one of the brightest and biggest of the rooms in the house is devoted to the use of the children. The goldfinch is singing away as we enter. It seems quite as happy as its feathered friends outside in the open. It is named "Joe," after a canary who used to roam about the house, but one day hopped on a stove in the studio, and was burnt. The toy cupboard is a small edition of the Lowther Arcade, and a rocking-horse is resting in the corner. The mantel-board is given up to some figures of "The Blue Boy" type, and a funny little Chinaman nods his head, and often brings a smile to the faces of the younger members.



"VAL."



"PAUL."

Over a big black chest hangs an unfinished picture by Henry Woods. This chest has a small interest. It has been the repository of drawings and sketches ever since its owner was eighteen years of age. Its drawers are brimming over now—Studies for "Edwin Drood," "The Casuals," "Fair, Quiet, and Sweet Rest," and many more. We are in the midst of looking at them when the children troop in from the lawn.

It is a natural question to ask Mr. Fildes if any of his children have ever found their way into his pictures. The golden curls of little Phyllis seem familiar to me, and I am wondering where I have seen that old lamp before which now stands on the top of the big black case.

If you look at the frontispiece of this magazine, you will find a reproduction of a picture which is the most beautiful in sentiment and exquisite in pathos of any painted in modern times. A little girl is lying on the two chairs, her head propped up by a pillow. The shade of the lamp is raised so that the light may fall on her face. Yes, they were Phyllis's curls, but the sleeping child was Mr. Fildes' little boy Geoffrey!

"When he wanted his morning sleep," said Mr. Fildes, "he used to be brought up to the studio. The nurse would watch him as he lay on the chairs. As he slept I painted. You see the hand falling



From the Picture by] THE VILLAGE WEDDING. [Luke Fildes, R.A.
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down by the side helplessly? One day, I had just finished the picture with the child's hands tucked up close together at the neck, as children sleep, when I noticed my boy's hand fall over the side. I thought it exquisite—so pleading and pitiful. I altered the hands in the picture at once, and painted the left one as you see it now."

The nurse asked for the lamp as a little memento of the painting of "The Doctor," hence its presence in the nursery.

The staircase leading to the studio is lined with many proofs of Mr. Fildes' work; the tapestry which hides the walls is very choice and beautiful. Here are "The Casuals," "The School Girl"—the diploma picture—and many Venetian views and figures. "The Village Wedding"—you remember it, the bridegroom holding the parasol of the bride, who looks down demurely, the stalwart guardsman with his mother resting proudly on one arm, and a young woman on the other who wishes "it was her"? The soldier came from Knightsbridge barracks—a fine fellow over six feet high. How

some ten years afterwards, I put up at Aston Tirrold, in Berkshire. I secured, as I thought, the very man for the bridegroom. He was a shepherd, and only recently married. A farmer, with whom I was very friendly, let me use his barn as a studio, but on this particular occasion I was painting in the apple orchard. I secured my shepherd friend, and soon after I had started sketching him I noticed he went deadly pale.

"Are you ill?" I asked.

"No, zur," he said, "I think it's th' smell o' that stuff you're using!"

"I suggested he should rest. He did so for ten minutes, and we resumed work. Suddenly he went more ghastly than ever.



From a Photo. by]

MRS. FILDES' BOUDOIR.

[Elliott & Fry.

"'You don't seem well,' I remarked.

"'I'm a' right, zur,' he answered, '*only for holding my breath so long!*'

"The poor fellow thought he had to hold his breath. But that is not all.

"'Haven't I seen you before?' I asked.

"'Yuz, zur, you painted me ten year ago on a horse. Why, I knew you th' minit I saw you!'

"He was the same lad I had painted for my 'Penitent,' at South-Stoke-on-Thames, all those years back."

We just looked for a moment into Mrs. Fildes' room. It is a curiously interesting apartment. Notice the children's tiny birthday presents, all bright and highly polished, carefully displayed in the vicinity of the fireplace—the little gridirons, candlesticks, and pots and pans. Even a rabbit with one leg gone is treasured. Several of Mrs. Fildes' pictures hang here. Close by the window is a portrait of her eldest boy, done in Venice in 1881. A small but choice David Murray is confessed to being the only picture Mrs. Fildes ever bought. Linley Sambourne appears as a

photographer, with portraits of Val and Paul. The photographs are many, and of course Henry Woods has a canvas or two in this delightful nook which looks down upon the Melbury Road.

We entered the studio, the work-room of a man who has painted with a truer touch of humanity than any artist of recent years. It is a grand studio, subdued in colour, yet withal relieved by numerous bright touches.

On an easel rests the portrait of Mrs. Fildes, the artist's first portrait, painted in 1887. Mrs. Fildes is in black silk and jet; a fur cloak is wrapped about her. A single diamond butterfly, a bracelet, and the wedding ring are the only jewellery displayed. The two portraits of the Duke of York and the Princess May are just finished; and as we look at them, the painter tells me how much impressed he was with the desire of the Duke that his mother should be satisfied with them. There are a dozen unfinished can-

vases about. The walls are lined with the works of intimate friends and engravings of the artist's own labours. Some of the etchings, particularly those of Jules Breton and Van der Meer, are very fine, whilst all the component parts of a painter's work-room—the great gilt and crimson chairs, the Florentine couches and tables, elaborately inlaid, together with the model's "throne"—are all picturesquely arranged upon the rugs which cover the floor. A charming bronze by Gilbert, A.R.A., is in a niche close by the shepherd lad who figured in "The Penitent." Mr. Fildes



From the Picture by]

MRS. FILDÉS.

[Luke Fildes, R.A.

bought it at the Academy before Mr. Gilbert was as famous as he is now. There are many works of reference and other volumes, and the framed Diploma of the Royal Academy, dated 8th December, 1887, "whereby in consideration of your great skill in the art of painting, it is our pleasure that your name be forthwith inserted in the roll of Academicians," is given a prominent place. Suspended



From a Photo. by]

THE STUDIO.

[Elliott & Fry.

from the ceiling are two quaint old-time Venetian lamps.

You pass beneath crimson plush curtains, and here is the light studio. Scattered about, with combined negligence and neatness, are countless tubes of colour; curious old pots are filled with brushes; oils, knives, frames, and what not, are all here. More unfinished canvases, mostly portraits, have their faces turned to the wall, for the sun is shooting its beams through the glass roof, and refusing you admission, so to speak, to the very inviting wicker chairs which suggest "sit down and make yourself comfortable."

But we selected a cosy nook, a little summer-house for two, at the bottom of the garden, and it was there I listened to the story—a story of intense interest—of the artist's life. It was told without the slightest suggestion of "see what I have become" about it. A huge fact was stated—a life led set forth—and from that statement made it was no difficult matter to discern the true cause of success. "Discreet independence" has always been the motto of the artist from the first moment he took his pencil in hand.

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Every man must make his own life, argues Luke Fildes, and he beat this thought into all his actions from his earliest youth. He, therefore, started on a good ground-work, and he has never looked back. His methods of working are practical. There are scores of cottages in the country where there is always a chair at the table and a cup of tea for him. He loves to paint the people—the country folk who live amongst the meadows and sleep beneath the thatch. He goes amongst them, becomes friends with them; he lives their life, and his brush chronicles it on the canvas. He strives to paint history—history in its most artistic up-to-date aspect. "The Doctor" is history. It is the medical man as he was at the end of 1890.

That doctor in the picture is no sentimental fellow. He is not thinking of the father and mother, though they be broken-hearted; the suffering child is his one thought. Perhaps he brought it into the world. He is wondering how science can meet the little one's wants. Still he keeps the cup on the table close at hand. It is the doctor of 1890. So with "The Casuals,"



From a Photo. by]

THE GLASS STUDIO.

[Elliott & Fry.

“The Widower,” “The Penitent” — the history of those who are unhistorical at the moment the painter puts it on the canvas. His versatility is great. Dickens was the first to recognise that. It is a wide bridge that connects the flower-girls of Venice with the applicants for admission to a casual ward! Mr. Luke Fildes is altogether an artist who can fascinate with the beautiful as truly as he can make one almost shudder at the pictures of life where the beautiful is seldom found.

Luke Fildes was born on St. Luke's Day, 18th October, 1844. Hence he was called Luke, his family having a strong leaning towards biblical names.

“I cannot trace any inclination towards painting in the family,” said Mr. Fildes, as he lit up a little Italian cigar, a box of which Henry Woods occasionally dispatches from Venice. “I was only about ten when my father died, and soon after his death I went to school at Chester, and lived with my grandmother, whom I shall always think of as ‘the indulgent one.’ I quite unconsciously turned towards drawing. Even before I went to school, my chief delight was copying and colouring pictures; my great ambition was to become the possessor of a big box of paints. At school, drawing became a passion with me. Whilst most of the boys were taught drawing, this subject was not included in my curriculum. But it was my happiness to watch them, and I used to draw by myself.”

The little artist was discovered, and at the suggestion of friends he was sent to the School

of Art at Chester. His progress was very rapid, and at the end of three months his master saw his ability, and said to his grandmother: “He ought to be educated for an artist.”

“Now,” said Mr. Fildes, smilingly, “I come from a stock who knew very little about artists — whose only notion of an artist was the travelling portrait-painter who in those days put up at the local inn, drank and got into

debt, and had a poor, long-suffering wife with a quiver full! So my grandmother was not impressed with the notion. She suggested something more substantial; but — always the indulgent one — she gave in to whatever I said. I should tell you that while at Chester I made the acquaintance of a water-colour painter, who gave me my first lessons in painting. He first opened out to me what picturesque art might be; we worked and talked together, and he showed me a new world. So, at last, in October, 1860, a few days before my birthday, hearing there was a good school and a capital master there, I migrated to Warrington — my first launching out into life by myself. I was then about sixteen.”

At the Warrington School of Art he met a boy named Henry Woods — a younger student than he, very clever, very companionable. And they became chums, and have never ceased to be so. As to what this very important meeting led to — more anon. There he worked under an excellent teacher. He began to *think*. He had in his heart decided upon what his profession should be, but how was it to be brought about? The Great Exhibition of 1862 drew him to London! London! It played havoc with him — made him restless, dissatisfied — and when, at the end of ten days, he returned to Warrington he was tired of the place, and surprised his master at the School of Art by telling him that he was going to leave the town.

"What are you going to do?" his teacher asked.

"I don't know; but I'm going to London!" was the answer.

The teacher gave him good advice, and advised him to try for a scholarship at South Kensington—then just established.

"If you get it," said the master, "you will have a definite object in view—you will have a right to your education."

So young Fildes came to the City of All Things in October, 1862, and went in and won a scholarship worth £50 a year.

"I had by this time," said Mr. Fildes, "formed very definite opinions of what art meant with me. I found the illustrated journal—*Cornhill* was just in the height of its popularity—*Once a Week*, for which Millais used to draw, and many more; and here I thought I saw a stepping-stone. I followed out my studies at Kensington badly, my heart and soul lay in a desire to be an "Illustrated" artist. A year went by—my scholarship was renewed for another year, when a momentous chapter in my life came, which led me to leave South Kensington, much to the disappointment of Mr. Burchett, the head-master under whom I was studying religious art, with a view to employing it in decorating frescoes. I got an introduction to Mr. William Thomas, an engraver. I sent him some sketches, and he gave me some work. More followed, until at last he said, 'Why don't you go in for it altogether? I'll guarantee you enough work.' So I threw in my lot, and began to draw for the illustrated journals. I did all sorts of work. I selected my own subjects, and they were written up to, making a speciality of London street life—'The Street Juggler,' 'The Street Doctor,' and things of that kind. All this time I was practising painting—going to life-class in the evening; gradually improving; always

plenty to do. Then came the summer of 1869."

The summer of 1869 was a great year for the R.A. in embryo. One night Mr. Thomas confided to him a scheme he had for a new illustrated weekly newspaper. He was the first spoken to on the subject. He was asked to draw something.

"What?" the artist asked.

"Anything you like," replied Mr. Thomas, "as long as it's effective and good drawing."

"I went home—I hadn't a studio then," continued Mr. Fildes. "It was a terribly hot night when at ten o'clock I sat down with a piece of paper and scribbled out the idea for 'The Casuals.' Some few years before, when I first came to London, I was very fond of wandering about, and never shall I forget seeing somewhere near the Portland Road, one snowy winter's night, the applicants for admission to a casual ward. It lived in



PEGGOTTY AND LITTLE EMILY.



STUDY FOR DRAWING OF EDWIN DROOD.

undertake the work, at the same time requesting him to submit one or two sketches of "girls." Two special sketches of incidents from "David Copperfield" were made—one of which, "Old Peggotty and Little Emily," is reproduced in these pages—and Dickens was satisfied. They began work together.

"He was very kind to me," said Mr. Fildes. "He was then living opposite the Marble Arch, and he asked me to many of his entertainments. He was almost fatherly, he seemed to throw a protecting air over me, and always elaborately introduced me to his guests. Soon after he went to Gad's Hill he wrote asking me to come and spend a week with him there. He mentioned the day I was to go, and that he would meet me. He wanted to show me some scenes he intended introducing in 'Edwin Drood,' particularly one for the 24th drawing, a cell in Rochester Gaol he remembered seeing when a child, and had never seen since. He wished me to do John Jasper in the condemned cell—what bearing that may have upon the true mystery of Edwin Drood will never be known, for it never appeared. I had packed up—preparatory to starting that same day—was just finishing

my mind, and as I sat there in my room I tried to reproduce it. I believe that very night was my turning point—everything dated from that. On the 4th December, 1869, the first number of the *Graphic* appeared, and in it was a full-page drawing of 'Applicants for admission to a Casual Ward.'

Just about this time Dickens was on the look out for somebody to illustrate "The Mystery of Edwin Drood." He had asked both Millais and Frith to help him. One night Millais surprised the great novelist by going to his house just after dinner, and throwing him a copy of a paper—the first number of the *Graphic*—shouted:—

"I've found your man!" and he showed Dickens the picture of "The Casuals."

"Yes, but can he draw a pretty girl?" asked Dickens.

So it came about that Dickens requested his publishers to write to young Fildes, asking him if he would



A STUDY.



STUDIES FOR DRAWING OF BURDLES.
("Edwin Drood.")

off some drawings, when I picked up a newspaper and read, 'Death of Charles Dickens!'

Unquestionably Luke Fildes was friendly with the Dickens family, for at this time Miss Hogarth—Dickens's sister-in-law—wrote to him to the effect that as his contemplated visit was one of the last wishes of the dead, would he come all the same before the home was broken up? He went. From this visit much, very much, resulted. The last work of Charles Dickens was to complete the sixth number of "Edwin Drood," so that he might be quite free for the companionship of the young artist. Whilst Mr. Fildes was in the house of mourning he sketched the desk and study where Dickens worked—he drew "The Empty Chair." As he was doing the desk the thought occurred to him how much better it would look in colour. He hurried to London, got his water-colours, returned to Gad's Hill, and painted it—every detail, every little particular. And all with no object, only with a view to filling up the time. But it proved to be the first picture of note ever painted by Luke Fildes, and came out as the Supplement to the Christmas number of the *Graphic* of 1870.

We left the summer-house for a moment and returned to the house. Mr. Fildes showed me a little memorandum porcelain slate bound round with black leather, a quill pen with the blue ink still upon it, and a square sheet of unlined blue paper. They were on the desk just as Dickens left them, and were given to their present owner by Miss Hogarth.

We returned to the garden once more.

"The death of Dickens," said Mr. Fildes, "had an extraordinary effect upon me. It seemed as though the cup of happiness had been dashed from my lips. I was tiring of wood-drawing, and being now fairly well off—for my work secured good prices—I determined to become a painter. I went to Millais and showed him two subjects. One was 'The Casuals,' the other an illustration I had drawn for *Once a Week*. Either of these, I considered, would make a good picture. Millais evidently thought, without saying so, that I was rushing in where angels fear to tread. He advised the *Once a Week* illustration, as there would be a better chance of getting rid of it. I took his advice—and also a studio in King Henry's Road, Haverstock Hill, and Henry Woods took another in the same house. I should tell you that two years after I left Warrington, Woods joined me in London, and we became inseparable, going about everywhere together. I started work on a 9-ft. canvas—rather a cool



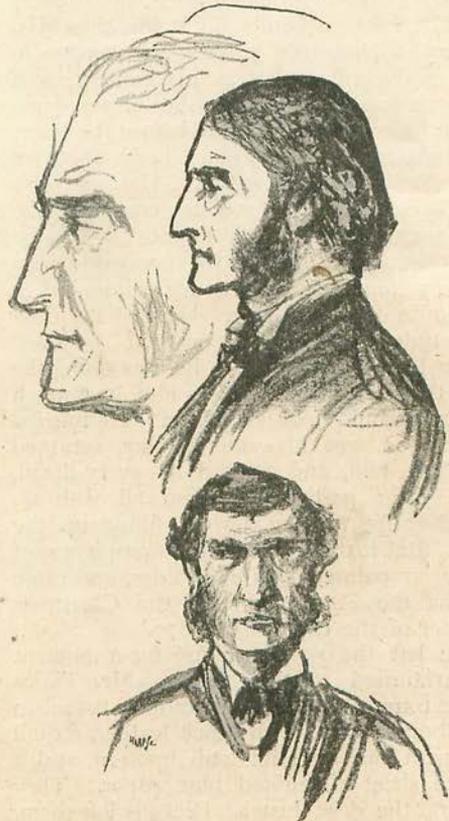
STUDY FOR DRAWING OF MR. SAPSEA.
("Edwin Drood.")

thing to do—and whilst working on this I still continued illustrating stories for *Cornhill*, and did many incidents in the Franco-German war for the *Graphic*, including that of 'The Dead Emperor.'

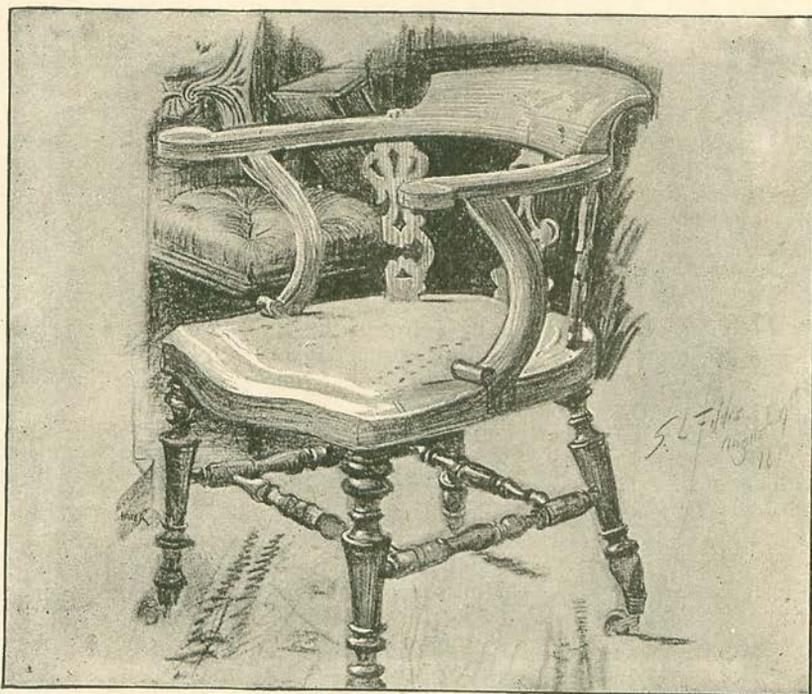
Then came a pretty little story. Mr. Fildes and Henry Woods went by the Thames to sketch. Henry Woods had two sisters, and they came up on a visit to their brother, and stayed where the two young artists were working. Miss Fanny Woods often sat to one of these artists. She is the girl sitting down in the stern of the boat in the picture of "Fair, Quiet, and Sweet Rest," which was hung on the line and "centred" in the Royal Academy of 1872. The picture was quickly "noticed"—it was the first work of an unknown painter. And 1873 brought "The Simpletons"—two lovers in a boat! But it was not until the summer of 1874 that Miss Fanny Woods became Mrs. Luke Fildes.

Mr. Fildes always had a leaning towards "The Casuals," and in 1874 he painted it. That, too, was a 9-ft. canvas. The picture is too well known to need description here—the mud and slush of the street, the suggested fog, the drunken loafer, the ruffian who "wants work, but wouldn't do it," the long, thin youth in the background, the sham soldier, the wife and husband cuddling up their children, the widow (who perhaps had never been a wife) hastening along, the policeman, and the bitter sarcasm of the "notices"—posted immediately above the poor fellow who holds his little one so tightly to him—of "Child Deserted, £2 Reward!" and "Lost a Pug Dog, £20 Reward!" But what stories the artist has to tell of his models for that remarkable work.

"I used to go out night after night," said Mr. Fildes, "and seek for types. I visited the various casual wards, and soon got to know the inspectors. If I saw anybody who took my fancy I gave him my card, and asked him to come round after he had picked his oakum. You notice that fellow with



STUDIES FOR DRAWING OF MR. JASPER.
("Edwin Drood.")



CHARLES DICKENS'S CHAIR.

his head bent down in the picture? He came to see me one morning wringing wet, and after sitting for a few minutes in the hall he was surrounded by a pool of water! Some of these people I had to stand in my studio on brown paper, and put disinfectants round them. The drunkard — that fellow with his hands thrust deep into his pockets —

was a perfect character. He would not sit to me without a quart pot by his side, which I had to keep continually filled.

“One day he said to me, ‘What this country wants is a good war — that’s what it wants!’

“‘Why?’ I asked.

“‘Why,’ he answered, contemptuously, as he took another pull from the pot — ‘Cosit’ud stir up trade.’

“‘What is your trade?’ I questioned.

“‘I’m a army accoutrement-maker!’

“The policeman I borrowed from Bow Street. The long, thin lad at the back, whom I found in a casual ward, was a stow-away. He was a lad of sixteen, and 6ft. high. He had tramped everywhere. He stowed himself away on a boat going to America, was discovered, flogged, tran-



From the Picture by]

“FAIR, QUIET, AND SWEET REST.”

[Luke Fildes, R.A.]



STUDY FOR DRAWING OF MR. GREWGIUS.
("Edwin Drood.")

shipped on another boat, pitched ashore at Liverpool, walked to London, and slept in the parks until I came across him. One of these fellows in the picture walked up and down outside my house all night, so that he shouldn't be late in the morning! How he escaped the police is a mystery."

"The Casuals" created a great sensation. It made a wonderful impression. Nothing at once so dramatic and real had been seen for years. The status of Mr. Luke Fildes arose at a bound. It was bought by the late Mr. Thos. Taylor, who also purchased "The Widower." Mr. Taylor's collection was eventually sold at Christie's, and "The Casuals" was sold to Sir George Holloway for 2,000 guineas, who stated afterwards that he had made up his mind to buy it, and was prepared to go to £4,000 for it. The picture now hangs in the Royal Holloway College, Egham.

A winter-spring stay in Paris in 1874 resulted in "The Milkmaid," the original studies being made in England. Whilst painting this, "The Widower" was maturing in his mind for the exhibition of 1876.

"'The Widower,'" said Mr. Fildes, "arose

out of an incident which happened in my studio when painting 'The Casuals.' I was painting in a rough-looking fellow with his child. He got tired of standing, so I suggested he should rest. He took a chair behind the screen. I went on with something else—no movement reached me, so I peeped behind the screen and there I saw the motive for 'The Widower.' The child had fallen asleep, and there was this great, rough fellow, possibly with only a copper or two in the world, caressing his child, watching it lovingly and smoothing its curls with his hand.

"'If I could but paint that,' I cried inwardly."

How Mr. Fildes succeeded may be gathered from the fact that it was "The Widower" which recommended him for his Associateship of the Academy. The model for "The Widower" was picked up on the streets—a countryman who had "come to London." Whilst painting this picture, Mr. Fildes began to build his present house, and "the model" was employed for some time in helping to



STUDY FOR "THE CASUALS."

lay the bricks. But he vanished into thin air.

In 1877 Mr. Fildes painted "Playmates," a strong and marked change from his previous work. In 1878 there was no picture in the Academy. He was in Venice.

"I had visited Venice previously in 1874," he said, "when I made my first visit to the Continent. It was there that I saw my artistic ideal of all that was beautiful. At first I was disappointed. I went there hot after painting 'The Casuals'—I was steeped in Casuals—and I did not find the Queen of the Adriatic as Turner and Byron defined it. But the squalor was soon transformed into the romantic, the gay and buoyant. It took my fancy, and I made up my mind to some time come and paint there. This opportunity came in 1878, and I soon began to flirt with Venetian art. I think my experience in this glorious city influenced me very much in my choice of a subject for the Academy of '79. Now, I always work best if I have a definite motive in my mind. 'The Return of the Prodigal' had been painted again and again—the picture of the man returning home once more was known; but what would be the attitude towards a poor woman under like circumstances?—how would *she* be treated? Then people were beginning to chide me. Why were my pictures always so gloomy? How could I expect such subjects to go with the curtains in the drawing-room? So I thought I would paint a strong dramatic picture in pleasant places.

"One day I was in a Berkshire village. Whilst talking to an old dame at her door, I noticed a pale-faced girl walking along the path. When anybody came along she crossed

to the other side; she cast her eyes upon the ground, and people looked her up and down. She seemed to tremble beneath their gaze.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"That's Mary Brown, sir. She's just come out of Reading Gaol!"

"What for?"

"Well, sir—well, she had a baby, and—*and it died. This is her first day home!*"

"That gave me the idea for 'The Penitent.' So I painted the home-coming of the prodigal daughter, the village and the villagers, the woman who knew all about her as she looked upon the form of the poor girl who, in an agony of grief and despair at finding the old cottage deserted, sinks down upon the threshold. But, somehow, few people saw my point. I don't think Piccadilly liked it, though it was a big success in

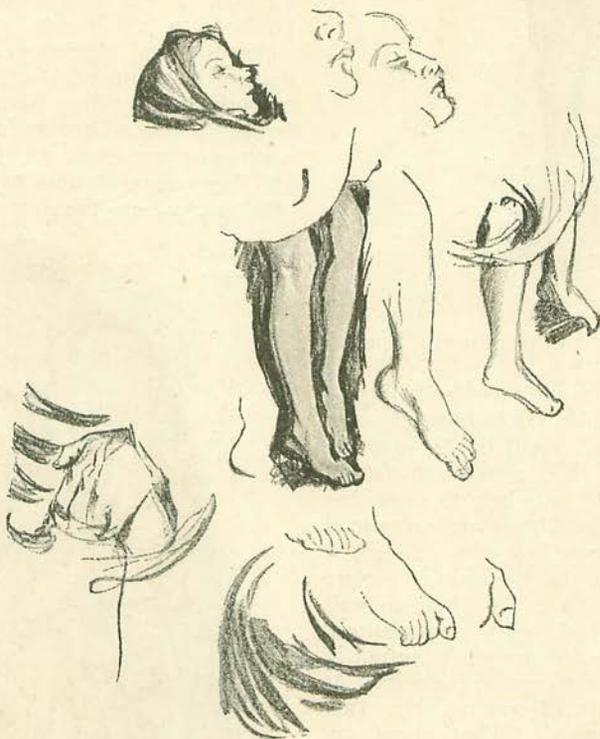
other places. I was going to call it 'The Return of a Prodigal'; but the gentleman for whom I painted it insisted that there was no such thing as a 'Prodigal Daughter!'"

"The Village Wedding" was exhibited in 1883. In 1883—84—85 Mr. Fildes made considerable stays in Venice, painting many pictures, chief amongst them being a large one for Mr. John Aird, one now in the possession of the Corporation of Manchester, "A Venetian Flower

Girl," which hangs in the Schwabe Gallery, Hamburg, "The Daughter of the Lagoons," etc., etc., and since then he has been much engaged in portraiture.

Then came the story of "The Doctor," which is reproduced in these pages for the first time in any publication.

"Some six or seven years ago," Mr. Fildes said, "I met Mr. Henry Tate.



STUDIES FOR THE CHILD IN "THE CASUALS."



STUDY OF THE STOWAWAY-FOR "THE CASUALS."

"I would like you to paint me an English subject," he said.

"I made up my mind there and then—'The Doctor'—a subject I had thought over for some years. He should be *the* actor in the little drama I had conceived—father, mother, child should only help to show *him* to better advantage. 'The Doctor' remained in my mind for a very long time, though it eventually proved the quickest painted picture I have ever done. Mr. Tate had to wait several years; I had other commissions. You see, I had painted my wife's portrait in 1887, and that gave me a run on portraits. At last, after four years of waiting, Mr. Tate came to me and asked, 'What about my picture?'"

"I'm going to begin *now*," I assured him, and he saw nothing of the work until it was quite finished and ready for the Academy of '90. I travelled to many places, from Devon to Inverness, to get thoroughly acquainted with the character of the cottages and people. Whilst on my journeyings I had been picking up odds and ends in furniture—even the cup and basin were specially purchased. I made

many sketches of fishers' huts, returned to town, and had the room built up exactly to size at the far end of the studio. It was a most substantial structure—even the massive rafters were there—and I painted a great cloth to look like a flooring of red bricks. The scene was just as you see it. The lamp was lit, and the light of approaching day coming through the window."

"And the models, Mr. Fildes?" I asked.

"You know who the little girl was. The woman was a professional model, and the same man who sat for 'The Father' also sat for 'The Doctor.' 'The Doctor' was painted practically from a model with a clean shaven face, a young man—very unlike what I wanted, but so selected that my model might not interfere with the impression I had in my mind of the kind of man I really wanted. When it was finished, to all intents and purposes, in expression and character, yet lacking that decision of manner that can be only attained by working direct from Nature, I levied freely on my friends who may have had a feature resembling my ideal, got them to sit for it, and thus compiled, from five or six persons, 'the doctor' in the picture as you have



STUDY OF WOMAN AND CHILD FOR "THE CASUALS."

him. Many are the letters I have received asking for the name of 'the doctor,' whilst one came from somebody who was ill, assuring me that she would be very thankful to have his address, for if she only had a doctor like *him* to attend her she felt sure she should soon get better!"

We left the summer-house, and on returning to the studio I saw an engraving of the picture of which we had just been talking. I

looked at the doctor's face, then at Mr. Fildes. I compared them again, and yet again. There was no mistaking it. Numerous people had posed for the medical man, many were the borrowed features, but unwittingly the eminent Royal Academician had—at any rate, to my mind—chronicled on the canvas what his own face will probably look like ten years hence!

HARRY HOW.



THE CASUALS.

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