

Sir John Lavery, R.S.A., R.H.A., R.A., LL.D was born at Belfast in 1856. An orphan at the age of three, he came to live with relations in Ayrshire when eleven. At eighteen he became an assistant to a photographer in Glasgow and attended classes in the evenings at the Haldane Academy of Art. Three years later he rented a small studio and advertised himself as Artist. Six months study at Heatherleys, London, followed, and on his return to Glasgow he occupied a room adjacent to that of Alexander Roche. These studios were shortly afterwards destroyed by fire and with the compensation received Lavery accompanied his friend Roche to Paris.

While abroad Lavery made great technical progress and on his return to Glasgow he was at once recognised as an artist of importance. His first large commission was the recording of the State visit of Queen Victoria to Glasgow in 1888. This was followed by an invitation to decorate one of the panels in the Municipal Buildings. The commission for the whole had been given to Roche, but Roche generously shared the work with Lavery, Henry and Walton. Lavery's panel was based on "Shipbuilding on the Clyde."

From its beginning Lavery was associated with the "Glasgow School" and was represented in the famous room of the Institute in 1890 and the Exhibition of the same year in the Grosvenor Gallery, London. Of the Continental and American invitations which were the result of these Exhibitions Lavery took full advantage, and he became the most widely known and popular of all the "Glasgow Boys." The Academy elected him an Associate in 1892 and an Academician four years later, The Royal Hibernian Academy gave him both grades of membership in 1906. He settled in London in 1896, becoming an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1911 and a full member in 1921. In addition he was a member of nine foreign Academies, and Vice-President of the International Society to Whistler and Rodin.

Lavery's technical accomplishment and extraordinary vitality enabled him to produce a most impressive volume of work. Single portraits and groups, interiors with figures, records of events of historical significance, landscapes and seascapes—snow pieces from Switzerland and African sunlight, came in unbroken sequence from his brush. His national sympathies expressed itself in a large series of portraits of prominent figures in Irish politics with which he generously endowed the galleries both of Dublin and Belfast. In our collections we have as his Diploma work ** The Rocking Chair," a typical example of his "Glasgow School" days, and "Stephen Donoghue in the King's Colours," which was bought by the Thorburn Ross Fund.

He received the honour of Knighthood in 1918 and was Chevalier of the Crown of Italy and of Leopold of Belgium. Lavery's first wife, Kathleen MacDermott, died in 1891, a year after their marriage, leaving one child, later the wife of Lord Sempil. In 1910 he married a widow of Irish origin, daughter of EH. J. Martyn of Chicago. Her death occurred in 1935. He himself died at the age of 85 at Kilmoganny, Kilkenny, at the residence of his step-daughter. An autobiography was published in 1940.

Obituary from 1941 RSA Annual Report