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ENJOYING PICTURES







# ENJOYING PICTURES

MEDITATIONS  
IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY  
AND ELSEWHERE

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*Clive Bell*

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*To The Colonel*

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## *MEDITATION*

<i>In The National Gallery</i>	Page 3
<i>In The Vatican</i>	„ 55
<i>On The Foregoing</i>	„ 85







## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. LORENZO MONACO	Legends of S. Benedict	<i>Facing page</i> 20
2. DEGAS	La plage	24
3. TIEPOLO (G-B)	Fragment of decoration	26
4. NEVINSON	War Scene	28
5. ZAGANELLI	Baptism	30
6. PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA	Detail	32
7. FRANCESCO FIORENTINO	Detail	34
8. ZAGANELLI	Pieta	36
9. MANET	Le déjeuner sur l'herbe	38
10. MANTEGNA	S. Cristoforo	40
11. DELACROIX	Les Barricades	42
12. ROMNEY	Family Group	44
13. VERONESE	Adoration	55
14. FRA ANGELICO	S. Lorenzo	56
15. TINTORETTO	S. Caterina	58
16. RAFFAEL	Parnassus	62
17. RAFFAEL	Parnassus (detail)	64
18. RAFFAEL	School of Athens	66
19. RAFFAEL	School of Athens (detail)	68
20. RAFFAEL	La Disputa	70
21. RAFFAEL	La Disputa (detail)	72

## ILLUSTRATIONS

22. RAFFAEL	Attila	<i>Facing page</i>	74
23. RAFFAEL	Galatea		76
24. RAFFAEL	Mass of Bolsena (detail)		78
25. RAFFAEL	Mass of Bolsena (detail)		80
26. RAFFAEL	Incendio		86
27. RAFFAEL	Sistine Madonna		88
28. RAFFAEL	Eve		90
29. RAFFAEL	Decoration		92
30. (a) Casket	German	Fifteenth Century	100
	(b) Revelation Suit-Case		
31. Cupboard	German	Fifteenth Century	102
32. Luncheon-box			104

*Meditation*  
*In the National Gallery*



# ENJOYING PICTURES

## *Meditation*

### *In the National Gallery*

I WANT to discover just what are the ingredients of my happiness in a picture-gallery. That was what I was thinking about as I left the National Gallery this morning and that was in my mind as I walked home from lunch in Chelsea: and between Chelsea and Bloomsbury there is room for a world of thought. It is not a simple investigation, and to pursue it by methods that come easiest to me is impossible. That is why I have given this essay a title which bespeaks the reader's indulgence: I call it a meditation. That neat *a priori* method which displays to such advantage a turn for simple thinking and clear writing will never do what I want to do now. Pray do not jump to the conclusion that I am going to be profound or slovenly; I hope I am as unlikely to be the one as I am certainly incapable of being the other. What I have to do is to follow the vagaries of my mind through a tangled experience—an hour in the National Gallery. I have to catch my reactions alive and pen them in phrases. Instead of making a neat hutch for tamed rabbits, my favourite occupation and my

## ENJOYING PICTURES

forte, I am to be following a dog that is hunting a wild one. It is a mood and a skein of digressive experiences that I have to recapture and record. If it sounds easy I can only say that for me at any rate it is not. Whence this little exordium: which is to beseech the reader to remember, when I seem to wander from the point, that the wanderings of my mind are the point, or, to avoid a contradiction in terms, the subject of my essay.

From time to time, while I was thinking about myself and my happiness, I thought about someone else—about someone and his unhappiness, or boredom, which is one of the worst kinds of unhappiness. I was not thinking about the adversary. The professional low-brow makes an excellent butt, a chopping-block or laughing-stock, but essentially he does not interest me. I rarely think of him. But how should I not think, since he is the shadow of my own delight, of the person—and there are thousands like him—every bit as intelligent as I, who is bored to misery in a picture-gallery? In accounting for my happiness must I not account for his apathy? By realizing what he lacks may I not come to understand better what I have the luck to possess? I will not take him sightseeing with me, but I will have it out with him when I get home.

A knowing friend who was good enough to read this essay in manuscript suggested that it might be called—"How to look at pictures". Not even to catch the eye of the Book Society would I perpetrate such an impertinence. But perhaps I might have called it "How I look at pictures" had



## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

I not already given it a form—subsequently much modified—which I conceived to be that of a meditation. Illuminated, however, by my friend's comment I perceived its implications. I saw that the way of looking at pictures which I had attempted to describe did suggest a kind of criticism vastly different from that with which at one time I used to favour the weekly-reading public. Formerly it was my practice, after visiting an exhibition, to take my impressions home, generalize them, and elaborate my generalizations into an article of two thousand words. I cannot say that I have abandoned the method, but in this essay, in part of it at least, I have adumbrated another, that of expressing as nearly as possible my immediate experience without attempting to generalize or draw inferences. I am well aware that this has been done before; it has been done pretty often, but not often I think by me; for I have always considered myself incapable of describing truthfully and readably an intense experience, and perhaps I was right. Nevertheless I believe it will be amusing and possibly instructive to essay an application of this method, new to me, in a further meditation; wherein I shall attempt to describe, as directly as I can, mixing I confess some *a priori* criticism and some generalization with description, a morning in the *Stanze*. Print, said Charles Lamb, settles it; and print I hope will settle it in my favour, for it is a method I should like to apply elsewhere.

Finally I have thought it civil to answer a question which, I feel sure, will have been asked often and tartly,



## ENJOYING PICTURES

not only by readers of these two essays, but by people who have been good enough to read any of my books. "What is all this fuss about? Why take art so seriously?" For it cannot be denied that I do make a fuss; nor yet that I take art seriously, though at times I may find it convenient to pretend that I do not. Art, pure thought and certain personal relations (call them 'love', if you like short, vague words) are indeed the only things that I can be quite serious about. I judge all others by their relation to and effects on them; and them alone I value as ends, or, to speak philosophically, as immediate means to good—we need not split hairs about terms, however. Pure thought must be the care of philosophers and men of science, and love can take care of itself: but art, it seems, cannot. That is why I make a fuss. Even the daily papers speak respectfully of love and friendship, physics and chemistry. Of the Royal Academy and the Old Masters they speak respectfully too; nevertheless art is not taken seriously. If it were, the beauty of cities would not be ruthlessly destroyed, hideousities would not spring up on every hand, coins and postage-stamps would not be eye-sores, Sir Reginald Blomfield would not have been till lately a member of the Committee of Taste. If many people in England took art seriously, Carlton House Terrace would not have been disfigured nor the Foundling Hospital pulled down. Also the gulf between those who do take it seriously and those who do not is perhaps the widest and deepest in the world. This needs explanation; I have offered mine in a final essay.

## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

One word about illustrations. They have been chosen solely with a view to illustrating the text. In some cases, the picture having been discussed in detail, the photograph is introduced for the reader's convenience. In others it merely supports a generalization. When a picture had been used for this latter purpose it seemed to me that the reader might be amused if I allowed myself a few words of particular criticism, with which he could agree or which he could contradict, even though such comment was not strictly to the purpose. Wherefore to those illustrations which do no more than refer to general ideas I have attached a few lines of particular criticism, and these I have put in their proper place, that is, at the foot of the page.

If my neighbour at lunch had asked me what I felt this morning, probably I should have fobbed her off with a bit of silly cynicism. I should have said that I had caught sight of my new tie in the mirror of Velasquez' glazed Venus and that the sight had put me out of humour for the day, or that I had seen the prettiest woman in London (bar one, of course) looking at the *Bacchus and Ariadne* and that none of the guardians could tell me her name. But suppose for some reason I had wished to tell the truth, what should I have said? I might have said that I had been intensely happy. But was I? Happy, yes; very happy, I will go so far; but would it be true to say that for an hour this morning, between twelve and one to be exact, looking at a few

## ENJOYING PICTURES

pictures in the National Gallery, I was intensely happy? Could I have been intensely happy for a whole hour? It is a question of words, and, as one finds the moment one begins to think seriously, words need more attention than they commonly receive. I was happy for an hour, looking at pictures: agreed. I was happy almost all the time, and the glow is on me still: granted. But I doubt whether, for more than three hundred seconds of that hour, my happiness was what I should call intense. Certainly, save at rare moments, it was not ecstatic; it was less, for instance, than the happiness of embracing the beloved. To what, then, should I liken it? Shall I call to mind days spent with friends, charming, civilized, witty people for whom I care and who care for me, days when I have been at my best, amusing and amused, conscious maybe that there was one whom particularly I wished to please and whom I succeeded in pleasing, shall I, remembering how I have said, with emphasis on the verb, "*I was* happy, there and then," suggest that for perhaps half an hour this morning my happiness, though different in kind, was about the same in degree? In degree perhaps it was; but in kind it was sufficiently different to make me mistrust the comparison. Rather would I say that during three-quarters of the hour my happiness came near the happiness, not the ecstasy mark you, of lovers, and that during five minutes it may have approached the ecstasy itself. For the remaining ten, I am willing to compare what the pictures could give with the pleasures of a successful "week-end".



## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

The ecstasies of love and art are perhaps remotely akin. The happiness of love, as distinct from the ecstasy, and the happiness afforded by works of art, as distinct from the ecstasy (I must work out these distinctions later), are, I think, just comparable: to be more exact, *my* happiness in love and *my* happiness in art appear to be so. They are comparable in degree; and in kind they have this in common: both are compounded of a variety of pleasures playing into and heightening each other (that too is matter for further discussion and elaboration). But of course in most ways they are unlike, since the pleasure given by an inanimate object cannot be at all the same as that given by a human being. The most one can say is that these two happy states of mind are analogous. I think we must be content with analogies and not hanker after identity. Why even the pleasures given by different kinds of art seem to me to differ considerably; and it is my experience that, coming out from a concert, I do not feel the particular kind of happiness I felt this morning: what is more, I believe I should not even were I fully sensitive to music and as capable of understanding the pattern of a symphony as I am of understanding that of a picture. And what are we to say about that further, and far more awkward question—How far, and in what way, does the pleasure given by one picture differ from the pleasure given by another when both are admittedly works of art?

I seem to be cutting out plenty of work for myself. I began by asking what was the nature of my happiness in a

## ENJOYING PICTURES

picture-gallery. That raised the question of the person who is unhappy in a picture-gallery. Why is he unhappy? I went on to wonder how far my happiness could properly be described as intense, and realized immediately that at most only a small part of it could be so described. Which part? Reflexions on the kind and degree of my happiness—already recognized as a composite state of mind—lead me to ask three further questions: (1) In what way, or ways, does this happiness resemble (a) the happiness, (b) the ecstasy of love? (2) In what way do the pleasures of different arts differ? (3) Why does the pleasure given by one picture (admittedly a work of art) differ from that given by another (also admittedly a work of art)? My hope—a bold one to be sure—is that in giving an account of my morning's adventure I shall give some sort of answer to them all. But I beseech you to remember that my main object is to describe an hour's experience; that to such a purpose a meditation seemed more convenient than a formal treatise; and that to bear with the meanders of a peripatetic aesthete travelling on foot from Chelsea to Bloomsbury requires of the reader patience and good-humour.

I imagine you will have been mildly irritated by my reiteration of the words 'pleasure', 'happiness'; and that is what I hope. It was my plan to make you notice that, for the moment, I was thinking more about a prolonged state of mind, an hour's enjoyment, than about the aesthetic

## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

thrill, the momentary shock of a great work of art. As you will discover soon enough, I still believe that there is a unique aesthetic emotion which is the essence and beginning of all aesthetic pleasures; from which follows the belief that in essence the pleasures given by all works of art—by all works of visual art, shall I say, to take no unnecessary risks?—are alike. But I also believe, indeed I am sure, that my sudden and violent reaction to the essence is not the whole of my experience, and that unessentials, the overtones of a work of art, contribute largely to that happiness which is not a momentary thrill but an enduring state of mind. This unique aesthetic emotion in which I believe, though never out of mind will not be the main theme of my meditations. Luckily—seeing that, since Mr. Richards stepped down from the heights of psychology to bring light into the dark places of aesthetics, belief in its mere existence has gone quite out of fashion. Why, only the other day, so fast do fashions change, so ephemeral are our best-constructed theories, I saw this old notion of mine and Mr. Richards' newish revelation lumped together in an American periodical as equally absurd and equally obsolete. I will confess that any little jar occasioned by a certain lack of amenity in the lumping was more than compensated to my mind by a presentiment of the pain such a conjunction would occasion in his. But that is not to the point; it is on an hour's happiness I am meditating and not on a moment's ecstasy.



## ENJOYING PICTURES

It cannot be denied that some of us do get pleasure from looking at pictures. Not the most abject brow, not Mr. Priestley himself, can deny that, though he can, and in his heart probably does, doubt. The doubts of professional low-brows, however, concern me even less than their certitudes. What concerns me is the fact that many an open-minded gentleman, who for a good part of his entertainment depends on books, finds it incomprehensible that anyone should not be as bored as he in a picture-gallery. How comes it that for one to whom books mean much pictures mean nothing? Generally the explanation must be that he reads wholly for information; and pictures, or rather pictures of artistic intention, are peculiarly ill-adapted to the business of conveying it. Generally it is because he goes to pictures for what pictures cannot give, and because he hardly conceives the existence of what they can, that our staring at Tintoretto's notion of the origin of the milky way when we might be reading Lemprière, strikes him as odd. And a queer pleasure, too, when one comes to think of it, this reading of his for information, which seems to combine the satisfaction of quenching a thirst with the delight of adding a piece to a jig-saw puzzle. A queer pleasure, fortunately great and almost universal; so that any retired colonel—I think of colonels because I have noticed that retired soldiers are numerous in this class of readers—who can bear in mind an outline history of the Peninsular War or of the Roman Occupation will be able to spend long happy evenings over heavy tomes,



## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

provided they can put him in the way of adding a piece to his puzzle or at least of persuading himself that someone else's piece will not fit. *Erat insitus menti cognitionis amor*, said the Latin Grammar following Cicero: yes, and what is this love of knowledge but a liking for putting things together? It is a common taste, and one I think much to the credit of the human race. Also picture-galleries, for all that pictures are such wretched information-carriers, do afford scope for its indulgence. I, myself, have spent mornings with kunstforschers, archaeologists and learned officials, and seen them come out to lunch glowing with that same joy which irradiates a friend of mine when, having devoted a month to the study of published and unpublished documents, he feels pretty sure that some other historian's imaginative reconstruction of what occurred in the Hôtel de Ville on the night of 9-10th Thermidor is demonstrably false. Only, their joy was not derived from historical or biographical information conveyed by a picture; it came from the acquisition of some small, new fact concerning the picture itself—its date, its provenance, or its relation in time or space to some other picture. And to get from picture-galleries pleasures of this sort, pleasures comparable with those of the historian amongst the archives, is needed a searching eye, a visual memory, and an amount of special knowledge, possessed in appropriate combination almost exclusively by professional experts. Pictures, unlike books, have rarely been designed by their authors to satisfy the jig-saw

## ENJOYING PICTURES

craving; wherefore the historically-minded are likely to get more fun out of books about pictures than out of pictures themselves.

Yet it would be wrong to pretend that the pleasure of discovering affiliations and proposing connexions is no part of my happiness, was no part of this morning's. Though small, it was an ingredient; but my knowledge is too general and my memory too untrustworthy for the delights of *kunstforschering* and connoisseurship to make me happy often or keep me so long. Even that statement needs qualification; seeing that my pretty wide acquaintance with works of art, though hardly amounting to connoisseurship, certainly does add frequently to my enjoyment. The reference of a passage in a Watteau or a Constable to Rubens gives a sharp twinge of pleasure, partly I surmise by tickling the jig-saw complex; and it is fun, and something more than fun, trying to determine precisely what part of a picture has been repainted or, in a school-piece, which touches are by the master. Here, however, we approach that frontier where expertise marches with sensibility: a few steps more and we shall find ourselves out of the land of scholarship and into that of pure aestheticism. And because in my analysis of this morning's happiness I want to give the pure aesthetic emotion its proper value, which is preponderant to be sure but not exclusive, I shall continue my search for overtones and adventitious delights.

When I look at Verelst's pretty portrait of Miss Sarah

## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Jennings I cannot but remember that she was the sister of that Frances Jennings of the Grammont Memoirs whose charms worked such mischief in the susceptible court of Charles II, that she was to become Marlborough's wife, Queen Anne's Mrs. Freeman, Pope's Atossa, and Horace Walpole's "Old Marlborough". These recollections, the fruit of general culture, give to a pretty picture an adventitious interest by which any educated person may profit if he or she be in the right mood. The right mood, however, as I must presently show, can be induced only by something that is not within the call of culture: it can be induced only by the pure aesthetic thrill. What is more, and here I touch on what seems to me a crucially important matter, these recognitions and constataions, be they, as in this case, historical and literary, or be they, as in the case of the Watteau, the Constable and the school-piece, technical, help to keep alive the *aesthetic mood* (the happy state of mind) once it has been kindled by that indispensable spark (*the pure aesthetic thrill*).

We thus find ourselves, at the outset, in an awkward tangle. Works of art, it seems, are charged with the power of (*a*) giving a thrill, (*b*) inducing and sustaining a pleasurable state of mind. The pleasurable state of mind is sustained, to some extent, by the subsidiary and adventitious qualities of the work of art; but even these subsidiary qualities can give their full complement of pleasure only to a mind already rendered susceptible and receptive. And the renderer-in-chief is the aesthetic thrill. The thrill



## ENJOYING PICTURES

is the beginning and the essential cause of all aesthetic experience be it ecstasy or happiness.

To make matters worse, the thrill itself, though it may come anywhere and anywhen, seems to come most easily to a mind rendered sensitive and receptive; and the commonest form of the sensitive and receptive state of mind is precisely this aesthetic mood. That is to say, the thrill comes most easily to one already in a mood which only the thrill can provoke. Obviously the first thrill cannot be the result of a former: it must strike on a sensibility otherwise attuned. The question then arises: what induces the mood in which the first shock is received? As I am an aesthete and not a psychologist it is no part of my duty to answer. But I am willing to throw out suggestions. The excitement of a peculiarly violent shock striking on native sensibility, the stimulating company and conversation of a sympathetic companion, something one has read or heard or seen may, and I suggest sometimes does, put one into an appreciative mood. Thus by some prodigious revelation one may be transported in an instant from cold to warmth; more probably by some less violent agent one is coaxed into a susceptible mood before the thrill-giver is encountered. Nevertheless, it is true to say that in nine cases out of ten the thrill is the beginning of aesthetic experience; and that all the happiness that lies between thrills—the aesthetic mood, that is to say—depends on them. You may walk backwards and forwards through the finest collection in the world, but

## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

until you have been thrilled by the pure aesthetic qualities of some picture, your sensibility will come alive reluctantly, your culture and scholarship will nothing avail. Whereas, once you have been profoundly moved you will be in a mood to catch pleasure from a hint of beauty or a suggestion of interest. In other words, those qualities in a picture appreciable by intelligence and culture can be appreciated at their full value only if intelligence and culture are at the service of sensibility. From which it follows that anyone who possesses such sensibility can avail himself of literary, technical or historical overtones to keep alive his mood, while one who does not, one who is incapable of receiving the aesthetic thrill, for all his intelligence and culture, will never attain to that state of mind in which his intelligence and culture might be of some use to him. This seems unfair, but thus it seems to me.

The inducing and keeping alive of the aesthetic mood is, I am persuaded, essential to happiness in a picture-gallery. For consider: the thrills themselves, the high aesthetic ecstasies, are sparse and to be measured generally in minutes or even seconds. That at least is my experience. Heaven knows it is the thrills we want. They, with the ecstasies of love—how much more intense, alas! and alas! how much more thoroughly realized—are what make life worth living. But for me these exquisite moments are separated by pretty wide intervals; and anyone who says that for him or her long days in the National Gallery are one unbroken rapture I simply do not believe. For one

## ENJOYING PICTURES

thing, as the Yorkshire farmer said of Hell, no constitution could stand it. If we are not to be bored, the long intervals—the greater part of the time spent in a picture-gallery—must be filled with some agreeable experience. That filling can be provided, I maintain, only by the pleasures of the aesthetic mood.

When one visits a rich collection for the first time, in the right frame of mind, thrills may come pretty thick and pretty fast. The element of surprise has been brought into play, and none is more provocative of sudden glory. But this quality of surprise, as my friends the *surréalistes* were to discover, is a stuff that won't endure. No doubt, walking in the National Gallery or the Louvre for the five hundredth time one may be surprised by a masterpiece: it is as though one saw it for the first. That happens; in fact this power of surprising old and intimate friends is one of the mysterious and unmistakable attributes of great art. One never quite gets used to a masterpiece, any more than one gets used to the beloved. It is a recurring miracle to discover that she or it is really it or she. We never get to the end of a great work of art nor discover our lady's last idiosyncrasy. But were anyone to tell me that he had been surprised every day of his life by Piero della Francesca's *Baptism*—surprised, mind you, not gradually coaxed into sympathy—I should take him for a boastful liar. Which seems to bring me back to that rather interesting distinction—the distinction between the aesthetic thrill and the aesthetic mood.



## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

I think it may be true to say that during almost the whole of this morning's visit I was enjoying an aesthetic mood. Some superb or peculiarly sympathetic picture gave the swing and away went the engine for the promised land. The thrill did not last; it cannot: after all, a thrill is by definition something short and sharp. But the thrill over, the ancillary qualities helped to keep the engine warm and ready for fresh departures. My notion is that when passion is spent these qualities maintain the mood. Also, conversely, I hold that from that mood we start most easily for ecstasy; that it is when we are in this aesthetic state of mind that we are most susceptible to an aesthetic shock. That is a theory which needs development and illustration; for the moment I am admitting again—and perhaps for the last time—that the pleasures depending on professional education and general culture, the pleasures of memory, of correlation, comparison and recognition, have all played their parts in my morning's entertainment.

Stories, on the other hand, those stories that every picture tells, have not. They have given me nothing appreciable. I often enjoy an illustration, by which I mean a drawing the sole aim of which is to imply a situation by visual means. I delight in Peter Arno and Steig. When it comes to an artist, such as Daumier, whose real object was to create expressive forms but who was paid to tell a tale, I find, as a rule, either that the story gives me no pleasure because of its lack of subtlety, or



## ENJOYING PICTURES

that it positively vexes because the artist's efforts to tell it have been detrimental to his design. Anyhow, the stories told by the painters whose work you find in the National Gallery—albeit the Primitives were much concerned with story-telling—give me no pleasure at all. The reason seems fairly obvious; it would be hard to devise a technique worse suited to story-telling than that which artists have elaborated for the purpose of expressing their peculiar feelings about visual experience. This the colonels appear to have noticed; for they laugh heartily over Low's graphic journalism but get no good of Lorenzo Monaco. Yet Lorenzo Monaco was trying to tell a story, and an interesting one; only he was trying much harder—subconsciously maybe—to do something else. Also his attack, admirably suited to his main purpose—creating an expressive design, is quite unsuited to the purpose of stating a series of historically connected legends: compare his lovely little picture (No. 4062 in the National

*Plate 1*<sup>1</sup> Gallery) as illustration, with a page by Caran d'Ache or

<sup>1</sup> What strikes me first and most agreeably in this charming little predella piece is the composition. There are no less than seven figures in the tiny space, yet there is no sense of crowding. Though an early primitive—fourteenth century—the drawing is perfectly adequate, reminiscent of Giotto: look at the crouching figure of the rescuer, look at that of the kneeling saint, or the majestic movement of the reader. In detail the painting is beautiful, to assure yourself of that you need go no further than the tablecloth. And though the picture is almost monochrome, the colour is not only adequate to the expression but in itself profoundly moving. Note how incoherent is the story—I question whether one reader out of ten will have got it straight—and how lucid the statement of the painter's vision.



LORENZO MONACO

LEGENDS OF S. BENEDICT

National Gallery





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

a comic strip by Krazy Kat. Also, please note that I am talking about story-telling proper, the recounting of facts and fables, and not about expressing visual relations between human beings. There are relations, discernible only by the eye and expressible only in line and colour, which are within the purview of plastic art. I must try to collect my thoughts about them in a later essay. For the present what I would be saying is this: so far as story-telling proper goes, the painters, by dint of taking much pains and by many ingenious contrivances, have succeeded in giving us something inferior to what the meanest penny-a-liner could have given in a couple of hundred words. To a public that could not read the painted tales of the Primitives meant much, to us they mean nothing or next to nothing—nothing to you, nothing to me, and nothing to the inquiring mind of that reading colonel who is bored to tears in a picture-gallery.

The mob of gentlemen who read with pleasure do not expect painters to regale them with a story. They know well enough that such information as painters can give will not be very interesting; and I think it significant that they hope better of buildings and furniture, which possess historical overtones easily recognized by literate people, than of pictures, the most obvious and easily recognized overtones of which are apt to be anecdotic. They would dearly like a little psychology, they who revel in the novels of Jane Austen and Henry James; and in certain portraits, especially those of the sixteenth and early seventeenth



## ENJOYING PICTURES

century, they get a little. Only, these psychologically interesting pictures are, as a rule, so wanting in aesthetic importance that their numbers are kept down severely in great collections such as the National Gallery.<sup>1</sup> As for those modern painters who think to enliven their canvases with a lick of literary interest, they succeed only in producing something which the colonel calls "silly", and so do I. And if you ask him whether he can conceive the fluttering human relations of *Emma* or *The Wings of a Dove* expressed in paint, he will tell you bluntly that he cannot. He is not unaware, we have agreed, of the historical and literary amusement to be found in portraits or pictures of famous sites and cities; yet even from these he gets less, it seems, than we. I have suggested an explanation; which is that to savour fully even these subsidiary pleasures the mind must have been predisposed by a purely aesthetic shock. This shock is just what the colonel never gets, because he is insensitive to the aesthetic, the essential, quality in pictures: and no shock, no mood.

Discouraged, he turns from pictures, from which he can obtain no narrative and little psychology, by which the historical and literary pleasures afforded are dim and dubious at best, and returns to his books. "And anyhow," says he, a trifle resentfully maybe, "history and biography are not my only reading. I like poetry, love it sometimes.

<sup>1</sup> Literate colonels would probably enjoy a visit to the National Portrait Gallery if they could surmount their well-founded prejudices against pictures and go there.

## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

One would have thought, since painting is supposed to be an art, that sometimes one would be able to extract from a picture the kick one gets sometimes from a poem." I do agree that poetry and painting, when they reach a certain pitch of intensity, have, on me at any rate, a like, though not an identical, effect. Also, if they are alike in effects it seems plausible to maintain that they have some predominant quality in common, presumably that essential quality which provokes the aesthetic thrill. Can it be that colonels are not wholly insensitive to this quality in literature though they are unaware of it in pictures? It might be so; but the experience of an hour's sightseeing is of such a different kind from that of an hour's reading or listening that it is well-nigh, though I think not quite, impossible to discover how much they have in common. The essential quality of all the arts may be, in my opinion is, the same; but quite certainly the unessential, yet indispensable, matter that clothes and carries that essence is not. Though the vital spark in every work of art may be identical, the bodies it informs, and on which it relies for existence, are as various as the forms of nature; and it is in these bodies we must seek those secondary qualities which sustain the aesthetic mood, but which may be recognized, though not fully appreciated, in any mood. Though we cannot forget for one moment that the subsidiary, or rather non-aesthetic, qualities of literature are so abundant and so nourishing that they suffice to keep an active mind alive and happy, whereas the non-aesthetic



## ENJOYING PICTURES

qualities of a picture hardly awake interest till aesthetic sensibility has been brought into play, yet we may wonder whether the aesthetic qualities of a book play no part whatever in the reading colonel's pleasure, as well as asking ourselves just to what extent the non-aesthetic have contributed to our happiness in a picture-gallery.

Literate colonels like Pope; so do I. But Pope was a wit, one of the greatest, and his wit is what most amateurs like him for. Now wit is not of the essence of poetry. There is poetry too—I should think there was—in Pope; and I believe—it is a belief based on experience—that colonels would not care so much for the wit were they quite insensitive to the poetry. My belief is that they are not quite insensitive, that they have some sense, rudimentary maybe, of the beauty of words and phrases, of their ordering, of the fitness of expression to content (of form, that is), and of the mind and attitude to life of an author as manifested in his use of language—that is of style. But I feel pretty sure they would get no pleasure from these, would indeed ignore them, would never have begun to read with that attention and concentration without which aesthetic qualities cannot begin to be perceived, if the wit had not been there to lead them on and sharpen their apprehension. If this be so, we shall have to admit that an appreciation of non-aesthetic qualities, which generally springs from aesthetic appreciation, may, in rare cases, become a means to aesthetic appreciation—to a very mild appreciation I agree. Anyhow it is certain that for literate



DEGAS

LA PLAGE

Tate Gallery





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

colonels the cognitive element in literature, if not the only one perceived, is by far the most important. Painters can be witty too: Tiepolo, Degas. They can observe and render the oddities of forms and gestures and the amusing relations of forms and gestures. But of these agreeable pranks and levities we, the aesthetes, do not take much notice till our hearts have been warmed by the purely aesthetic appeal of lines and colours. For us the purely aesthetic element is the essential. And here, I think, we can note a real distinction.

By many intelligent people who possess no natural taste for painting, the witty and surprising things, which speak directly to the intellect, are the things immediately perceived. A bright Philistine is flattered by an appeal to his wits. So, for that matter, are we who claim to be of the elect but deny that we are stupid. Sometimes a clever artist will reduce a familiar object to its bare and unfamiliar skeleton, and we shall all be pleased when we recognize in this bald improbability the very thing. "The very image of a cat," we all exclaim. The abstraction has the excitement of an epigram. At other times the artist will deal with a situation, a puzzle of confused forms and move-

<sup>1</sup> (Plates 2 and 3.) Both these great artists, Tiepolo and Degas, are capable of getting fun out of witty vision and witty execution. Crudely comic illustrators—common *Punch* men, for instance, Partridge, Stampa—do no more than illustrate a funny legend. Their vision is banal, and their treatment would do just as well for a sentimental anecdote in the summer exhibition at Burlington House. On a far higher level you get men with a witty vision, capable of expressing it wittily, who are yet impure artists. Forain,

## ENJOYING PICTURES

ments, and will describe it with such admirable economy, eliminating, simplifying, referring by implication merely to a hundred unstated facts, that his condensation, once its implications are perceived, will give the sort of pleasure felt by an elementary mathematician, when a jumble of heterogeneous data about trains that meet two miles short of half-way and their respective speeds and hours of departure, has been reduced to an algebraic formula. The statement is short, neat, surprising and manifestly correct. Wherefore

Charles Keene, Rex Whistler, Max Beerbohm, the younger Tiepolo are of this class, which, you will perceive, is not to be despised. Their fun is supplied partly by what they see, partly by how they render it, and partly by what we know. In such art there is always a literary element—references, recollections, allusions, for the joy of the initiated. Suppose Mr. Whistler were to discover some resemblance, not purely physical, but moral, intellectual or historical, between Mr. Osbert Sitwell and Louis XIV, he would as likely as not give us a portrait of the former, not precisely in the manner of Bernini, but with sly references to baroque sculpture in general and to Bernini's portrait in particular, such as would prevent our ever quite forgetting a possible kinship between the poet and, not so much the monarch himself, as that figure of the monarch at Versailles. Now in the very greatest examples of witty visual art there is no such literary content. Tiepolo and Degas saw wittily and are deliciously sly in execution; but what they perceived was a purely visual comedy pertaining to forms alone, a joke that can be rendered only in line and colour. All the wit of this Degas lies inside the frame; and no word of explanation will help anyone to see it. It is a joke about forms told in forms, and it could be told in no other way. But I am going beyond the limits of my note; for this self-sufficiency is a characteristic of all great art, and something about which I shall have to write later in a different connexion. The greatest visual artists describe only those aspects of appearance which can be apprehended exclusively through eyes and rendered perfectly in visible forms alone. By no other means can their content be either apprehended or expressed.



TIEPOLO (G.-B.)

FRAGMENT OF DECORATION

Correr, Venice





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

pictures of this sort please nimble-witted persons almost as pregnant phrases and epigrams please:

"And so obliging that he ne'er obliged."

or, more poetically,

"All the live murmur of a summer's day."

Of my pleasure in a picture-gallery part no doubt is due to this power of all good artists to present statements of a startling economy which, nevertheless, are recognized at once as adequate and convincing equivalents for a jungle of detail. And I am sure that this magisterial power of disengaging the essential, which, in smaller men, becomes a mere knack of discovering unexpected likenesses, is the main road which leads unaesthetic but quick minds occasionally within a thousand miles of the country of visual art. There are plenty of clever fellows who can hit upon a shape, utterly unlike what most people believe the shape of a cat to be, which yet, on inspection, will appear to a pleased and surprised public "the very image of a cat". This pleasure of recognition ministering as it does to self-esteem, is considerable and happily by no means rare. Open-minded soldiers for instance, during the war, anxious to see something in this new stuff called "cubism", were apt, I remember, to heave-to before the pictures of Mr. Nevinson and Mr. Nash and set their brains going. They liked being confronted by something that looked to them dimly like a chess-board with a few pieces on it but *Plate 4*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It would have been easy to select a picture that illustrated better the way in which a clever fellow can catch an unexpected yet startling like-

## ENJOYING PICTURES

suddenly made them exclaim, "Why, that's the country behind Ypres!" In their enthusiasm they even went on to discover in what had looked rather like the bishop a perfectly fair representation of "my old observation-post in '15".

Now this delight in recognition, this pleasure of jumping from the shin-bone to the monster, is shared, I fancy, by all bright people be they colonels or aesthetes. It played some part in this morning's happiness, no doubt. But if from a visit to a picture-gallery I got no other pleasures than these—the pleasure of surprise at the artist's cleverness and my own, and some small satisfaction of historical and biographical curiosity, I should not go sight-seeing often. In themselves these are not enough. Moreover, even these will not give all they have to give, will not blossom and smell sweet, till they have been warmed in the favouring atmosphere of the aesthetic mood. If these were

ness, and please by allowing the spectator to discover for himself similarity lurking in dissimilarity. Also it would have been easy to select one by a better painter—by Mr. Nash, for instance, to go no further than my text. But I have chosen this because it was before this very picture that I overheard exclamations analogous to those I have cited. Nowadays the picture seems realistic enough. Not so in 1916. To the unsophisticated picture-goer of those days it appeared daringly abstract. This may seem incredible in 1934, but so it was in the third year of the war. In fact Mr. Nevinson was about ten years behind the times, and even then had failed to perceive the point of post-impressionism. Instead of imposing expressive design on incoherent facts, he has endeavoured to wheedle from the facts a design which, in 1916, should look smart and up-to-date—"cubist" in fact. The result is feeble in the extreme. Nevertheless, the picture achieved at the time what I take to have been its purpose.



NEVINSON

WAR SCENE

Imperial War Museum





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

for us, as they are for the colonels, the essential, indeed the only, qualities in a picture, we should be as bored as he is in a picture-gallery.

At last I am in a position to distinguish, to my own satisfaction, between the aesthetic thrill (or shock) and the aesthetic mood (or state of mind). The difference, I think, may be likened to the difference between the ecstasy of passion and lovers' happiness. I meet a masterpiece; am bowled over, knocked out, carried away, ravished: I care not what word or words I use provided I can make you realize what I feel. The first event is something comparable with—I do not dream of saying as intense as—falling into the arms of your beloved or the beloved falling into yours. That is ecstasy. Afterwards, while she is still with you, have you noticed how everything you say seems to possess a heightened significance, a subtlety hitherto unknown, and how your understanding of what is said seems to have become preternaturally vivid and delicate? You talk, probably about yourselves, and you seem to be saying and understanding as you never said or understood before. That is what I call lovers' happiness: it is one of the most exciting things in life. The aesthete, too, has his happiness—happiness following ecstasy. He talks to the picture about the picture, or rather about what he feels for the picture. If alone, he expresses himself to himself; if with a sympathetic companion—and that I find the happier state—he talks aloud, much as children prattle at play, not

## ENJOYING PICTURES

greatly caring whether they are heard and understood. At first maybe he talks a little wildly, so that what he says is not what he wants to say: the fact being that what he feels, and tries to express at first, at the first impact of the whole work, is nothing less than the aesthetic thrill—a feeling ineffable. Wherefore he, if he be like me, tends before long to concentrate on parts and tries to say something about them, which is easier. For my part, at any rate, I soon find myself following the work through its intricacies and exclaiming at particular beauties. I pitch on the drawing of a detail, proclaim most unnecessarily its beauty, and go on to decide whether it is the beauty of a form that expresses the painter's sense of the object, or of an arabesque bubbling up from his excited invention. I peer into those subtly related tones that give a sense of distance and rejoice in the luminosity and depth of the sky. I use—but with what conviction—some trite epithet of admiration about some passage of paint, and wonder whether the harmony is the miraculous discovery of some hitherto unguessed-at accord, or whether it is not the delicate and divinely appropriate application of some traditional effect. It is now that one is glad of a companion to whom can be pointed out one's discoveries and their implications, to whom one can communicate one's excitement. But it is not for his or her sake that I have likened this happiness to lovers' happiness; for it depends on the existence of no other human being and passes entirely between the worshipper and the object of his cult. It



ZAGANELLI

BAPTISM

National Gallery





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

is the lovers' converse of the aesthete. And I have called it, hoping that the name might find favour, enthusiastic analysis.

Enthusiastic analysis, which becomes possible only after aesthetic ecstasy, is a conversation between a work of art and an aesthete about the work of art and the aesthete. The picture is revealing itself in detail and we are trying to express what it makes us feel. Compared with the happiness of being with an adored human being I find it a lop-sided experience, which admission will, I hope, persuade the reader that I am trying to speak the truth when I add that it is one of the best that life has to offer.

All the happiness that art can give is given only to those who have attained the appropriate, that is the aesthetic, mood. Only in that mood are we perfectly receptive. Further, the mood is induced only by a peculiar experience which I have called the aesthetic thrill. The nature of that thrill I have attempted to indicate, and I have tried to seize it at its extreme intensity because so it is most comprehensible and most distinct. But plenty of pictures which give genuine aesthetic emotion give something less emphatic. Though but moderately charged with the gunpowder stuff, they are charged sufficiently to provoke a small explosion; and this explosion suffices to bring on the aesthetic mood. All which may be summed up thus: only works of art possessing some modicum of pure aesthetic significance—pure beauty of form and colour—are capable of provoking the aesthetic thrill; only that thrill

## ENJOYING PICTURES

can induce the perfectly receptive state of mind; and only in that state of mind is one capable of enjoying all that a work of art has to give.

By way of illustration let me meditate this morning's adventure. Two of the pictures before which I stayed were certainly not great works of art—were by no means thrillers. One was Zaganelli's *Baptism*, the other a family group—The Beaumont Family, I believe—by Romney. Of these the Zaganelli was enough of a work of art, had enough pure beauty, to put me into that mood from which

*Plate 5* enthusiastic analysis starts; and this is what I got of it.

The composition, I felt, was traditional rather than personal, but in a good tradition, that of the fifteenth century; and though not surprising, not of a kind to make me wonder how on earth anyone should come to see things in that way, not stupid either. What caught my attention first were the two figures on the left. They seemed to me stuck and heavy, and I came to the conclusion that they were there only because Zaganelli felt that they ought to be there. For a moment—I cannot see exactly why—they reminded me of Signorelli, a painter frequently in my mind, and yet they still seemed less personal, more 'ready-made', than anything else in the picture. That outstretched hand is surely no more than a credential; but I noticed that the hand was nicely drawn and led my eye back to the draperies in which I found pleasant passages of paint (however, this man is neither a fine nor an original colourist—said I), and so to the head of the outside



PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

DETAIL

National Gallery





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

woman which made me exclaim, "Could he have seen Raffael?" Yes, he could: on that point the dates attached to the frame are reassuring. And, anyhow, I prefer to imagine that I can discover some trace—at third hand even—of this master, rather than attribute all that has been borrowed to the respectable and pervasive Francia. Zaganelli came from the Marches and worked in Ravenna or thereabouts; but that proves nothing to the contrary seeing that Raffael was thirty-one and world-famous when this picture was painted. And now I come to look at them more closely I seem to find something vaguely Raffaelesque about both the figures. I suspect Zaganelli thought it necessary to make them look so; what is more, the little girl standing below has taken up a Raffaelesque pose. The prettiness of the painting of her figure, on the other hand, strikes me as Tuscan, since it cannot be Victorian, and that charming wreath of flowers even more than the flutter of the skirt reminds me of lovely things coming out of Florence. I like the reminder. All the same, the wreath, when it catches my eye again, I feel to be without the serious beauty of Piero della Francesca's or *Plate 6<sup>1</sup>* the nervous precision of Francesco Fiorentino's. Is it after all more Victorian than Florentine? *Plate 7<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Piero della Francesca's wreath is a form beautiful in itself and perfectly appropriate as part of the design. It is not a decoration but an integral part of the picture, more massive than floral. Fiorentino was a minor painter; his wreath is decorative, and therefore perhaps not quite fused into the picture. But it is more nervously, more sensitively, drawn than Zaganelli's, which, if truth must be told, does smack rather of Victorian than of Florentine taste.

## ENJOYING PICTURES

Look instead at the angel sitting on a rock. It is an angel, I suppose: or is it another little girl? (An angel can't be a girl, S. Thomas Aquinas says; and what S. Thomas says about angels goes.) Be she what she may, the drawing of her leg and foot is delightful; and I dare say the painter would have made her head as elegant as a head by Fra Angelico if he could—or was it, had he dared? In 1514 one had to take watching an historical event less gaily than one took it in 1420; and anyhow Zaganelli could never have drawn anything comparable with a head by Fra Angelico. But by now I am in such a happy mood that I can find the figure of Christ sympathetic and almost beautiful. The pose is conventional, I agree; but the drawing is not. The artist felt genuine enthusiasm for his model while he was painting. How knowingly rendered are the feet in the water and the reflexions of the legs! He was proud of that bit of observation and pride bursts out in beauty. Christ's drapery is most elegantly designed; it scans with that of the two little girls, or of the little girl and the angel, if that be the sound interpretation. But the slope of the neck and the head are feeble; and that comes of accepting a conventional pose. I enjoy the drawing of Christ's praying hands and of the child's hands resting on the lute. I do not get much good of the figure of the Baptist, and the Dove over his head strikes me as ridiculous. It is purely iconographic. Could it have been repainted? I might consult an expert: but experts are . . . experts. The suspended angel—no mistake about sex this time, and



FRANCESCO FIORENTINO

DETAIL

National Gallery





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

only angels could fly in those days—who is in fact a boy holding a towel, is at least curious. He gives me pause. Presumably the painter wished to show that he could manage a difficult piece of foreshortening, and he has. But the middle-aged mannish expression of the head won't do: the whole figure is clumsy. This makes me look at the expression on the faces of the other children; and it appears that they are feeble too. I suppose the artist, absorbed in making them look as he thought they ought to look, lost in the struggle not only his sense of the object but his power of creating attractive arabesques. More curious still is the deeply receding background. One might ascribe it to the seventeenth century, to the eighteenth even; and at moments it has looked to me definitely un-Italian, this Chinese watering-place. Yet it does well enough as a vista and vanishing-point, and makes me wonder whether there was not something odd about Zaganelli after all. Timid and convention-abiding he may have been—he was a cautious colourist certainly—but was he banal? May he not rather have been a personal artist hardly strong enough to force his temperament through a ready-made plan?

When I look at the lunette (a *Pietà*) above the main picture, an odd composition with a marbled tomb suggestive of a Victorian shell-box, I am strengthened in my beliefs. The angels bear out my notion that the artist was bothered by the necessity of giving heads their appropriate expression. To his credit goes the movement of the

Plate 8

## ENJOYING PICTURES

head and neck of the one on the right. This made me think for a moment of the neck of Thetis in Ingres' great picture at Aix, only to realize a second later the immensity of the gulf between a great and a minor artist. The draperies are pretty, and so in its clumsy way is the drawing of the right-hand angel's leg. And what are we to think of that patch of thigh emerging from the draperies of the left-hand angel? (The model was a girl whatever S. Thomas may have said.) Is it merely to rhyme with the ill-modelled arm, or did the painter see it so and get his little thrill? I begin to suspect that Zaganelli was a more personal artist than I had supposed.<sup>1</sup>

All these details I observe emotionally, each observation having for me the thrill of a discovery. One thing

<sup>1</sup> Since writing this essay I have made a little tour in the Milanese and Romagna—where one meets Zaganelli at every turn. It was disconcerting to realize that pictures which now struck me as amongst the most characteristic in the Brera I had formerly saluted with a stupid and apathetic nod—disconcerting but natural enough. Any work of art that counts is full of qualities to be extracted only by serious application, which qualities, once extracted, assume for the discoverer a distinct and probably excessive importance. The eye will fasten on a picture by a minor artist one has been studying across a gallery packed with masterpieces. At Milan there is a *Pietà*, which, with its marbling and shell-work, its feebly interesting drawing and elegant draperies, reminded me most reassuringly of what I had written a few weeks earlier in England. There is a Madonna enthroned, in which it appears that Francesco was helped by his brother Bernardino, which displays another of those odd and slightly disquieting backgrounds. All I saw confirmed my impression that Francesco Zaganelli was a small artist with an interesting temperament. Incidentally, and irrelevantly, all I saw raised my opinion of the painters of the Romagna—especially of Rondinello, another minor man, to me hitherto unknown almost.







## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

leads to another; a visual start may provoke an historical excursion or a bit of hagiography or a venture into comparative criticism. This I call enthusiastic analysis. It gives me happiness; but my happiness, you observe, is compounded of strange ingredients, of pure aesthetic emotion primarily, but eked out with historical curiosity, mild connoisseurship and general culture. I could go on talking about my reactions to this picture, but shall not, because, before walking to the farther end of the gallery to seek out the Romney, I want, standing here, to propose a notion that has come into my head during the last five minutes.

You may or may not remember that at the very beginning of this essay I asked and left unanswered several questions of which one was—"How far and in what way does the pleasure given by one picture (a work of art) differ from that given by another (also a work of art)?" I perceive a possible answer—"In the quality and quantity of food provided for enthusiastic analysis." The chief respect in which one picture differs from another is, of course, in power of provoking the grand aesthetic thrill. Incontestably that is the most important, but as surely it is not the only, respect. I suggest that differences in the power of pleasing—making happy I would rather say—between pictures, all admittedly works of art, may depend on the quality and quantity of this food. Consider for a moment three pictures, all manifestly charged with that power of thrilling without which the enthusiastic mood cannot begin

## ENJOYING PICTURES

to be generated, yet differing greatly, it seems to me, in the quality and quantity of food they provide. I should like to consider the Mantegna fresco of S. Christopher in the Eremitani at Padua, partly because I saw it lately, chiefly because it was of that visit I was thinking when, a few pages back, I tried to give some general account of enthusiastic analysis, likening it to the happiness of lovers. Also let us consider, since it is notoriously arresting, that picture by Delacroix which I always call *Les Barricades*, though I have a notion that in the Louvre catalogue it goes by some much longer name; and lastly another striking picture, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* by Manet. Here are three pictures, thrillers all, from each of which I derive happiness, but which differ vastly, so far as I am concerned, in the quality and quantity of happiness they provide. It should be interesting to see how far this difference in pleasure-giving corresponds with a difference in their provision of food for enthusiastic analysis.

*Plate 9* To begin with the last, the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*: though I see it at least four times a year, it never fails to thrill and surprise me at first sight. On inspection it invariably disappoints. Of course there is matter for enthusiastic analysis in this fine composition; but less, far less, than I should have expected. I cannot linger before it, allowing new and subtle beauties, overlooked at first, to lead me on to more, and more subtle. All the charms of this attractive picture are on the surface or near, and give themselves at the first summons. It is the gorgeously



*Archives Photographiques*  
Arts Décoratifs

LE DEJEUNER SUR L'HERBE

MANET





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

dressed window of a poorly stocked shop. To be sure, the rather academic beauty (freshened by a taste of Courbet, however) of the bathing figure and the charm of the boat, in the middle distance, do not strike one at first. Neither does the rather insensitive drawing of the bather's arm. The background is really too much like a very good backcloth to hold one's attention long. The clothes and whiskers of the gentlemen transport me agreeably to the rattling days of the rasta empire and the good life then to be lived in the Batignolles quarter. Did they go out and demonstrate against the Mexican expedition, these young painters, or are they "assagis"? It is fun, too, recognizing in the principal lady the model for the *Olympia*, who doesn't look so "mince et Baudelairienne" now that she's sitting up. And of course the still life in the corner is charming: it always is. But when all is said, and more doubtless might be said, the quality of food provided by this picture is not of the choicest and the quantity is definitely scant.

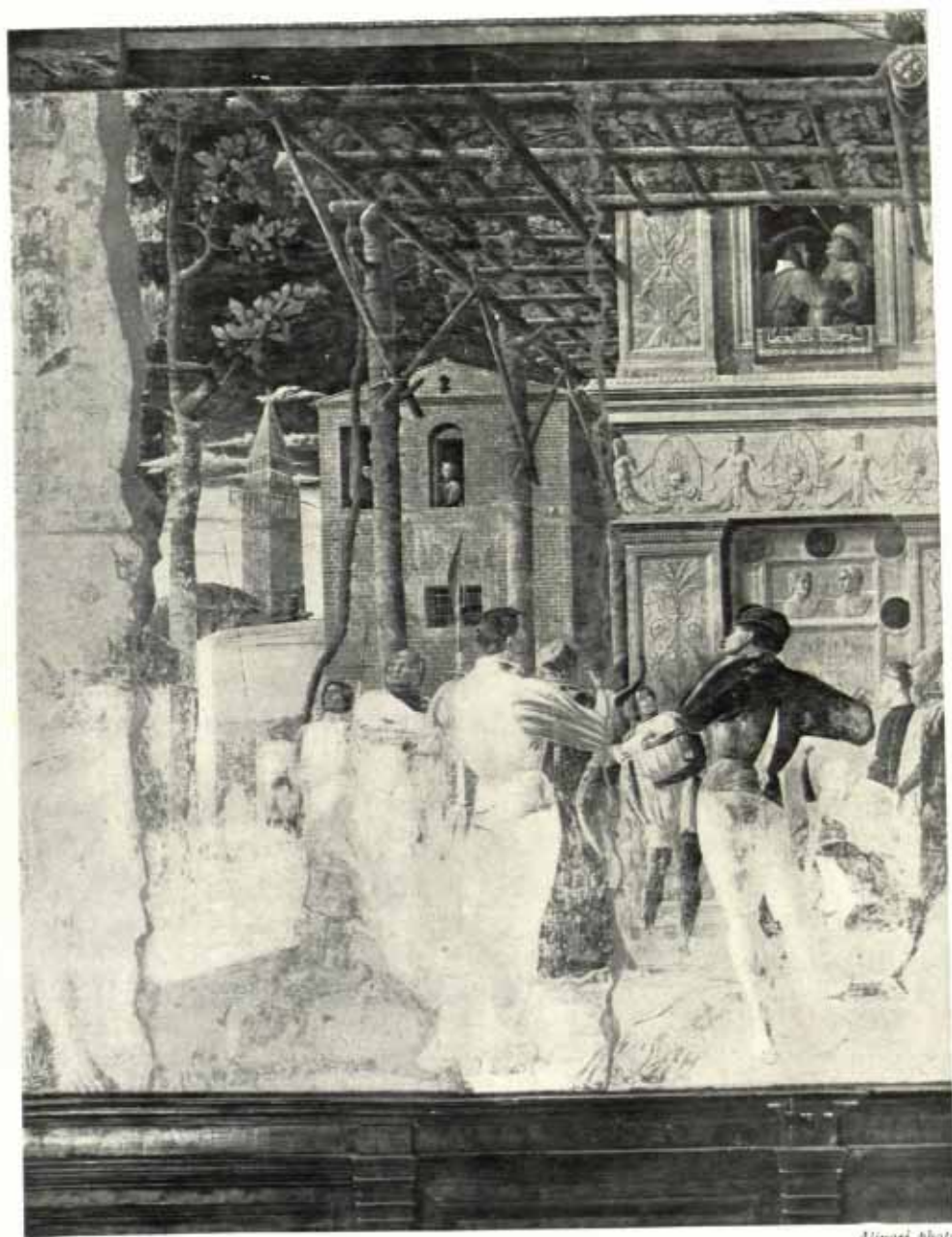
When, for the fourth time, I visited the Eremitani at Padua I was with a sensitive and sympathetic companion. We went straight to the S. Christopher. My first thrill of admiration was as great as ever, and the subsequent thrills of discovery and recognition which rewarded our concentration were scarcely less intense than the first. Every detail of this superbly nourished masterpiece provoked emotion, and many awoke curious ideas and whimsical fancies as well. The beauty of the foreground figures

Plate 10

## ENJOYING PICTURES

—observe the movement of the head to the right, the amazing drawing of the arms, the strain on the material of the clothes—is in its exquisite tensity Florentine, while the two soldiers on the extreme left make us realize how much Mantegna got from Roman sculpture and how magnificently he bettered his instruction. The façade of the house, as delicately lovely in its grey as the campanile of the distance is in its pink, is almost a date and a signature in itself: behold the revival of learning! How perfectly drawn is the pure Roman head on the extreme right of the picture, how entertaining at the top the infidel getting a ricochetting arrow in his eye. Every detail is full of amazement and delight: the almost obliterated figure, kneeling I fancy over some limb of the gigantic saint; the pergola of magically painted vines; the brick house with the tiny figure, worthy to stand in the foreground of any picture, and here unimportantly looking out of the window. But you have already had enough, and more than enough, of my ecstasies and capers before works of art. Suffice it to say that I can hardly think of a picture more richly charged than this, all damaged and fragmentary though it be, with matter for enthusiastic analysis. Here is food, not for feeling only, but for thought and recollection, of highest quality and superabundant. If you are not convinced, I commend you to the work itself; or, failing that, to the photograph which, alone, will give you some idea of the food for enthusiasm a masterpiece can afford.

Consider Delacroix's famous piece: past question this



MANTEGNA

S. CRISTOFORO

*Alinari photo*  
Eremitani, Padua





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

is a thriller, the most startling picture I suppose the artist ever painted. At first sight you may think it less empty *Plate II* than Manet's, or, as I should prefer to say, better nourished; but I doubt whether it rewards concentration more generously. For, alas! my roving attention is called back, not so much by beauties of paint or drawing lying patent but unostentatious in quiet places, as by mere melodrama and stimulants of historical and literary curiosity. Here is food enough, but what are we to say of the quality? That it is not much inferior to what Manet provides but not to be compared with that provided by Mantegna. The first shock passed, the temperature of our enthusiasm falls rapidly; till enthusiasm has dwindled to interest, that is, to the second-rate. This is a good picture: still more is it an interesting one: it is not great. The purely aesthetic qualities, the line and colour, are often happy, and sometimes more than happy: they are never ravishing. In the content there is enough to keep historical, literary and archaeological interest at work for some time. There is no need to remind you of what happened in Paris on July 28th, 1830. You think of Notre Dame and Victor Hugo, and by extension of Rostand even,

"Il faut savoir mourir pour s'appeler Gavroche."

But between the excitement of the first thrill and the fun of the subsequent analysis the disparity is really too great. Compared with Manet, this picture gets the worst of it. To me, the thrill is less violent: on analysis the food for

## ENJOYING PICTURES

pleasure is found to be in quality, which is what matters most, inferior: only in quantity, thanks to opportunities presented for thought and recollection and display of erudition, is it superior. Compared with the Mantegna it is frankly insignificant.

Summing up, I suppose we shall agree that, given the thrill, the pleasure provided by Mantegna is of the highest quality and in quantity immense. By this masterpiece all our best powers of perception and appreciation are called to the front and thrown into action. Our happiness in its company is acute and prolonged. Before the Manet, a striking picture if ever there was one, enthusiasm is short-lived; for the work once apprehended in its entirety offers not much to keep feeling or even thought and scholarship alive. Delacroix offers less than Manet and infinitely less than Mantegna; for what he offers, though considerable in quantity, is of inferior quality (interesting rather than moving), of a kind to stimulate the naïve imagination perhaps, but hardly to keep alive more subtle perceptions and intense emotions.

Here, then, it seems, we have a possible method of classification. Far be it from me to suggest that it is the only method. But it might give interesting results if amateurs would make the experiment of seeing how far their preferences amongst pictures, all admittedly works of art, depend on the quality and quantity of food provided for enthusiastic analysis. It will have to be borne in mind, however, by anyone making the experiment, that whereas



DELACROIX

LES BARRICADES





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

the grand aesthetic thrill is absolute, the pleasure-giving capacity of much of the content (all that is not matter of purely aesthetic detail) will be conditioned by the experimenter's private likes and dislikes, and not only by his preferences and prejudices in pictorial style and method, but by his literary and philosophical leanings, by his general taste in life.

I had almost forgotten Romney. I stand before his picture and nothing happens. I am as cold and lonely as a stuffed fish. There is no thrill, so no aesthetic mood is induced. Because I am not excited I am not inquisitive even. I cannot begin to be amused by the details, some of which must be historically interesting, because there is no call to analysis. It is as though I had a cold in the head. *Plate 12*<sup>1</sup> Clearly I am not in the right mood. Either there is no pure aesthetic quality here, or not enough to thaw my apprehension to that malleable state in which it takes impressions. I pass on untuned.

Hugging the remnants of my penultimate experience, I leave the gallery, and, on the steps, again fall to thinking

<sup>1</sup> *Ex hypothesi* there is little or nothing to be said about this picture—a few words of negative criticism at most. Unlike most English eighteenth-century pictures it lacks prettiness of paint even. The quality is harsh and metallic. You would expect to find some pretty passages in the lady's skirt. There is not one. I suppose the heads are the heads of distinguished young Englishmen, but what has that to do with art and the aesthetic thrill? The figure in the kit-cat portrait is even feebler in drawing than the figures in the picture. I find nothing here to hold me.

## ENJOYING PICTURES

of the colonel. For suddenly it strikes me that the state of mind in which I became enthusiastically analytical about a picture is not unknown to lovers of poetry. Surely enthusiastic analysis is part of their happiness, too. Having read through *Samson Agonistes*, do they never feel inarticulate before the whole, incapable of applying to such multifarious and complex grandeur anything better than trite and unsatisfying encomiums? So far as mere words go, they are not likely, I agree, to find anything more adequate to particular phrases. Yet somehow it does seem more satisfying to vent one's feelings and communicate one's excitement by stopping at the lines:

He all their Ammunition  
And feats of war defeats  
With plain Heroic magnitude of mind,

reading them aloud, jumping up maybe, and exclaiming, "By God, that's good!" than by bestowing a meed of just applause on the tragedy as a whole. Doubtless it would be proper and creditable to apply the ejaculation, in retrospect, to the entire piece; but would it be as satisfying? Does it not seem more cognate, nearer to the fact, when vented in a particular tone of voice about a particular passage? And, having paused so long, being now in a happy, appreciative frame of mind, with all our faculties wide awake, shall we not stay a little longer to enjoy the superbly successful bid of "Ammunition", to savour the play on "feats" and "defeats", and to remark the Saxon



National Gallery

FAMILY GROUP

ROMNEY





## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

"plain", the Greek "Heroic" and the Latin "magnitude" by means of which the poet exhales his admiration for the unconquered mind? And what is this but enthusiastic analysis?

Now if the lover of poetry, startled into the aesthetic mood, which, mind you, he cannot be unless susceptible not to adventitious interests only but to the very essence of art, knows this peculiar and enduring happiness, it seems hard that the cultivated colonel, whom we are now assuming to be an aesthetic poetry-reader, should be all at sea in a gallery. Yet he is. And the only explanation I can suggest is that from works of visual art he is incapable of obtaining that preliminary thrill, failing which the subsidiary qualities—literary, historical and whatnot—which he could appreciate, remain unilluminated, comatose and buried in the stuff of the picture. When you come to think of it, since the stuff in which painters express themselves is utterly different from that in which poets express themselves, there is no good reason why a person capable of appreciating one should be capable of appreciating the other. Though art may be single, the arts are divers; because a man can understand one it does not follow that he will understand all.

Yet it is a fact, queer and worth noting, that people who care genuinely for painting are apt to care genuinely for pure poetry also. I offer no explanation. I have observed that painters who are not silly—by which I mean painters capable of responding to qualities in pictures not

## ENJOYING PICTURES

their own and unlike their own—respond to pure poetry as a rule—that is, when they can give their minds to it. To most of the overtones—echoes, reminders, references and associations—they are deaf inevitably; but to the essential poetry they react, and when that quality is absent they are amusingly disgusted. Plenty of educated and sensible people are taken in by the well-rhymed stuff of Messrs. Kipling, Masfield and Noyes: there is so much else in it that they can dispense with poetry. Not so the poetry-loving painter. At least I never met one who would not have felt immediately and acutely the lack of poetry in the verse of these writers. Examine a painter's bookshelf; you may find it instructive. Surprisingly often you will come upon a Dante or a Baudelaire well thumbed, and discover that the foulest, most paint-besmeared, pages of his Oxford book are those that represent (alas! inadequately) the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets. Painters, I have admitted, are generally ill-equipped to relish the secondary pleasures of literature, the historical, biographical, comparative: also, on a work of literary art in which these played an important part I should prefer the opinion of the colonel. I should take his judgment of Professor Trevelyan's next volume—and Professor Trevelyan is in his way an artist—in preference to theirs. But if a painter, of the sort I have in mind, told me that a new poet had published something remarkable I should send for the book at once; whereas I would not walk across the street to look at a picture because my friend Mr. F. L.

## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Lucas—as critical and fastidious a poet as any living—had commended it.

All this seems strange and slightly annoying, and I do not know how to account for it. Neither do I quite know what it has to do with my thesis; in fact I fear it may be irrelevant. Certainly it is not much to my immediate point, which is that because a person is able to appreciate literature it does not follow that he can understand painting. As for that, I have tried to give some account of my own state of mind in a picture-gallery, and to discover the sources of my happiness. Many, if not most, of my readers will probably feel that theirs are different, richer, more intense, and more precious; but I shall be surprised if all do not agree that ninety-nine out of a hundred of their friends are in the colonel's case or worse. The question then arises—why do they (the ninety-nine per cent) go in their thousands to the winter exhibition at Burlington House? Certainly the people of England, men, women and children, flock to that show as they flock to the Derby. Why? I think I can answer that.

Take the Italian exhibition. One thing is clear, they did not visit it because they liked Italian pictures. If they liked Italian pictures they would go to the National Gallery; for there they would find an exceptionally fine collection of Tuscan, Umbrian and Milanese, Bolognese, Ferrarese, and Venetian paintings, visible all the year round, and five days a week free of charge. Yet the National Gallery is never crowded. On the contrary, were



## ENJOYING PICTURES

it not for the conscientious foreigners, the custodians and the lovers it would be one of the loneliest spots in England; whereas Burlington House during those three months was one of the most congested. And if the public did not go there for pleasure, for what did it go?

When I said that the public 'flocked' to Burlington House I used the word advisedly. One speaks of a flock of sheep. Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones and all the little Joneses go to see the Italian pictures because everyone goes; and Mr. Jones (possibly accompanied by Mrs. Jones) goes to the Derby for much the same reason. Also Mr. Jones (a linoleum manufacturer in a fair way of business who cannot tell a thoroughbred from a hackney) will, almost before the horses have rounded Tattenham Corner, put down his glasses and confide to all who may be listening that "the favourite wins", or "is beat", as the case may be—that will depend upon the way he has been betting: while in Burlington House he will inform Mrs. Jones and the little Joneses that the Christ in Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation* is badly drawn. Yet only one born with a gift of observation, who has improved that gift by exercise, can possibly tell a quarter of a mile from home whether a particular horse will stay; and only those who have cultivated a rare native sensibility can so much as understand what is meant by good drawing. Nevertheless Mr. Jones goes to the Derby and to the Italian pictures too.

When I say that he goes because everyone goes I am, of course, begging the question. For why does everyone

## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

go? Also, if I say that everyone goes because the newspapers tell him or her to go, I have not much advanced the discussion, seeing that the newspapers are only everyone become articulate—more or less. Why does everyone tell everyone else to go? More simply—Why does everyone go?

We must seek the explanation, I fancy, in one of those pathetic delusions which make the human race at once ridiculous and lovable: the delusion that the best things in life can be bought, if not for cash, at any rate for good will and courage. When Mr. Jones goes to see the Italian pictures he is performing an act of culture, just as, when he goes to church, he is performing an act of worship. Going to church and going to picture-galleries are two forms of that homage which matter pays to spirit in the touching and ever-disappointed hope of getting something for its pains. Mr. Jones, like everyone else, is aware that there are, and always have been, people who get from art something so exciting and important that by comparison the minor pleasures of life, to say nothing of what are generally reckoned the major activities, become insignificant. Like almost everyone he would disbelieve it if he could; but the excitement of these fanatics is so passionate, their happiness so manifestly real, that, again like almost everyone, he is convinced of the existence of something he cannot understand—aesthetic ecstasy. I may add that the fantastic prices paid for old masters confirm his disquieting belief; for Jones cannot realize that millionaires

## ENJOYING PICTURES

covet Rembrandts, not for their artistic significance, but because they are the rarest kind of postage-stamp on the market.

So Jones is bent on getting a bit of this intense and satisfying happiness which it seems that art can give. The Joneses no longer expect much of religious observance. These hundred years they have summoned the household to family prayers, but somehow that state of ecstasy in which St. Francis is said to have passed his days escapes them. Maybe it is the difference between the twelfth century and the twentieth, maybe it is the difference between Mr. Jones and St. Francis. Be that as it may, in Europe the man and woman in the street seem rather to have lost hope of family prayers as a means to spiritual exaltation.

Art remains. That wine of the spirit which is not to be found in churches and chapels is perhaps preserved in pictures and on tap at Burlington House. So to Burlington House goes Jones: he even takes Miss Jones to Florence. Strange, by the way, that though Jones will give a whole month's holiday to taking his daughter to Florence, he will never give up a Saturday afternoon's golf for a visit to the National Gallery. Charity begins at home, but Culture, it seems, begins and ends on the continent (a temporary loan exhibition is of course quite different from a permanent national collection; to go to Burlington House is to go half-way to Italy, is as meritorious—shall we say?—as a trip to Antwerp). Anyhow the Joneses are now doing



## IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY

their spiritual tipping on pictures; and pictures, I fear, are not giving all that was looked for. The headache comes sure enough, and the bad mouth, but not the inebriation. The fact is, that, though any fool can get drunk in a night club for a few pounds, to get drunk amongst the Primitives one must be another sort of fool. Meanwhile Jones trapeses round the rooms, his wife reading from the catalogue, the children shuffling in the rear. He has been there only an hour and never in his life was he more tired. But when, with an ill-feigned air of tearing himself away, he has given the word of release, when he finds himself again in Piccadilly, how good a cigarette tastes, how gay and lively the cabs and omnibuses appear, how he will enjoy his lunch! Perhaps, after all, the Italian pictures have done something to enrich the life of Mr. Jones; but hardly in the way expected.

So I must repeat what I was saying before I indulged in this little jaunt with the Joneses. Ninety-nine per cent of our acquaintances are in their case or the colonel's. They all get little or no good of pictures. For them I have a message, which I beg you, my readers and betters, to hand on; hand it on to the colonels and the Joneses, the globe-trotters and the Baedeker-bearers. It is simple, and it is this: "There is nothing surprising or shocking or humiliating in not being able to appreciate pictures." People notoriously sensitive and intelligent are not ashamed of owning that they are unmusical. For my part I am not so very much better off at a concert than the colonel is in



## ENJOYING PICTURES

a picture-gallery. The adventitious beauties, or some of them, I may enjoy, a melody here, a harmony there; but as for grasping an intricate and unfamiliar piece of music as a whole, disentangling the parts, and realizing each in itself and in relation to the rest, that I cannot do. It would be senseless to pretend that I could, for my musical friends would not be taken in. I do not therefore attempt the enthusiastic analysis of a symphony with Madame Marcelle Meyer or Mr. Sackville-West. Similarly, those well-meaning people whom I encounter gushing through the galleries of Europe do not impose on me—not for a moment; and if I dared I would say to them: "Believe me, dear Sir or Madam, because you are literate you have no grounds for supposing that you are sensitive to painting; because you are intelligent it does not follow that you are sensitive to art of any sort; why it would be as reasonable for me to suppose that if only I could mend a motor-car I should understand Einstein."

*Meditation*  
*In the Vatican*









VERONESE

ADORATION

National Gallery

*Meditation*  
*In the Vatican*

**L**ONG before I reached the *stanza dell'Incendio* I was asking myself why I had come. I had been trying for years, by way of atonement for childish flippancies, to like the paintings of the high Renaissance, and by now I knew, or thought I knew, that I did not like them. I felt pretty sure that those outbursts of my nonage, right or wrong, were sincere—the expression I mean, a bit exaggerated may be, of genuine disappointment, and not the fabricated reactions of sensibility at the service of a theory. Why had I come from Venice with a crick in my neck, induced by trying to get some good of those acres of overhead *admirata*, when all I had got—apart from the crick—was the courage of my conviction that Venetian eighteenth-century painting pleased me better than sixteenth? That heresy, so stiff and cross was I, I would maintain anywhere and anywhen.

It is easy to say, I muttered as I went, that the art of Gian-Battista Tiepolo, apart from its prodigious virtuosity, is just an art of observation and comment, whereas that of Veronese is one of poetical idealization; and it is as easy to point out that one artist was born some two hundred

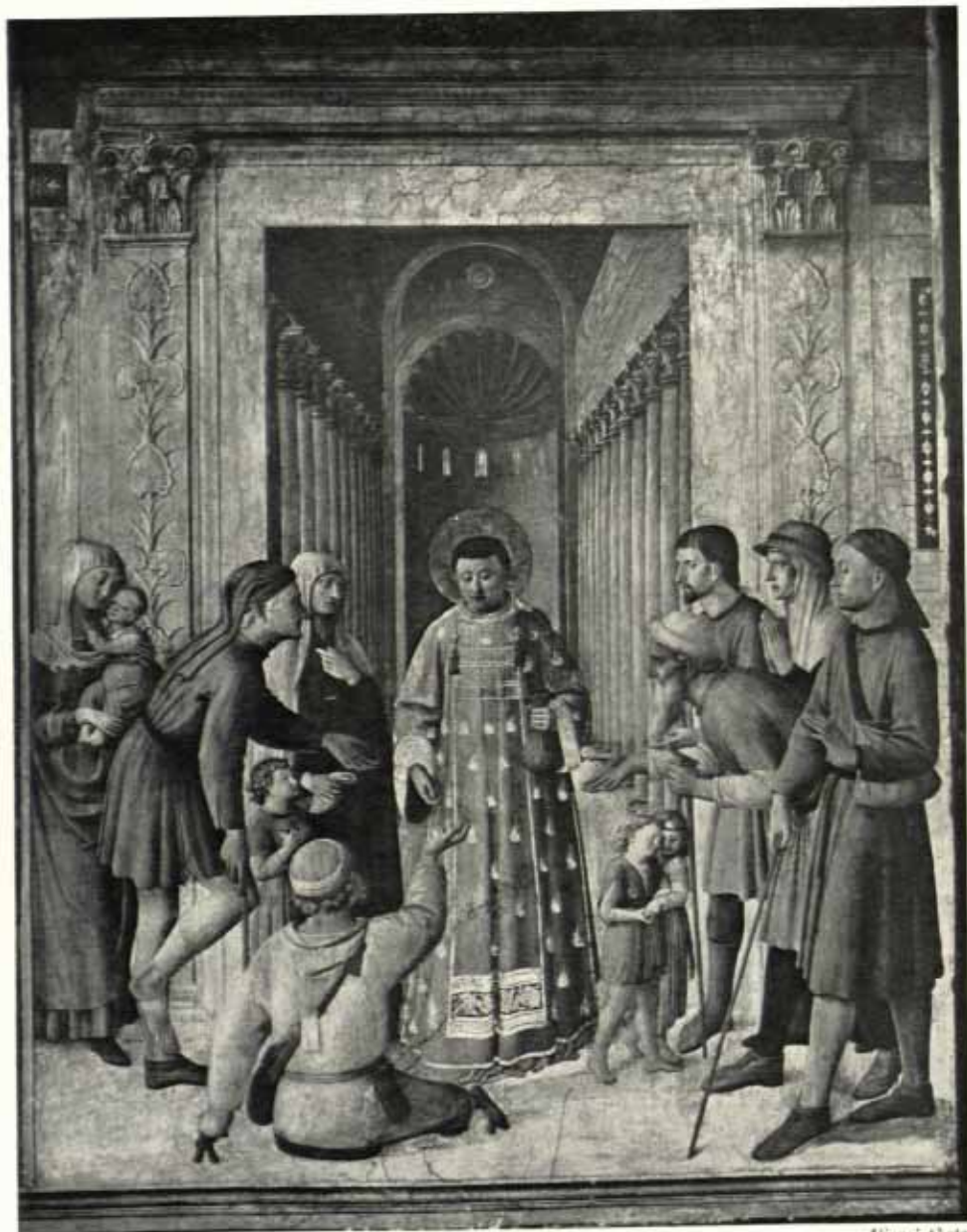
## ENJOYING PICTURES

years later than the other: and what, pray, does either of these two easy affirmations prove? Would it not be more helpful to make oneself realize that in the best of Tiepolo there is scarcely a figure or a gesture which has not cost a sum of observation, sensibility and intelligence far beyond the means of even exceptionally gifted people? <sup>1</sup> Let anyone recall his or her own sense of Venice, vivid and alluring as it probably will be, and compare it with that of this amazing man, who saw the common incidents of Venetian life—an old fellow getting out of a boat, a dog lifting his leg against the wall (dogs always seem to be doing that in Venice)—with an acumen and a delight, not unknown to us maybe, but if known remembered as a rare and cherished experience. Of his almost uncanny dexterity, seen to greatest advantage in large and elaborate decorations, I say nothing; but surely it is fantastic to make light of anyone in whose best work is manifest an abundance of that perception, understanding and power, a modicum of which in common life suffices to distinguish the first-rate human being from the crowd?

Odd, is it not, that only a Venetian seems able to express himself in Venice? At least that is what they say, and I think there is some truth in it. Certainly a Venetian Renoir which I happened to see the other day was more unlike a Renoir than I should have supposed any

<sup>1</sup> See Plate 3. When I wrote these lines I had much in mind the frescoes in the Villa Valmarana, of which I would gladly have given an example. Unfortunately, when last I was at Vicenza they had not been photographed: I believe something is being done about them now.





FRA ANGELICO

S. LORENZO

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican





## IN THE VATICAN

picture by that extremely personal artist could have been, and the same was true of a Venetian Corot. It must be, I think, that Venice has so strong a character that she impresses it on every lover, be he Renoir or Corot or a humble tourist; and consequently the artist, instead of imposing himself on his subject is imposed upon. Instead of getting Renoir or Corot on Venice, we get Venice by Renoir or Corot or the English lady painter in water-colours whose obituary notice appeared in yesterday's *Times*. It is a matter of Venice first, and afterwards as much of the painter as Venice requires to show herself off. Of course these men of the sixteenth century about whom I am thinking were Venetians: but they had very little need of Venice; they had their bag of tricks. And had they cared more for the object and less for those grand abstractions of theirs, they might have been poets instead of being rhetoricians. Had they observed more and generalized less, certainly they would have been more entertaining. But rhetoric was the bane of the Renaissance, said I, as I marched through those interminable corridors and saloons that lead at last to the *stanze*. Plate 13<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Well, here is Veronese and what he felt about the Adoration—a straw-thatched manger in a classical ruin: he certainly made the most of two worlds. So far as composition goes he had not much to learn from anyone. But when he treats us to a bit of first-hand observation, as in the backside of the kneeling boy or the two men peering down on the event, how we take notice! As for expression; he has expressed a sense of opulence and a sense of hurry in so far as anything can be expressed in the standard forms and gestures of high Renaissance magnificence. And all the rest is "Words, words, words" or rather Paint, paint, oil-paint.

## ENJOYING PICTURES

So grumbling, I reached the *stanza dell'Incendio*. Why should I not hurry through the Raffael rooms—albeit Raffael was barely of the high Renaissance—till I came to that chapel at the end which Fra Angelico painted. There at all events I should find no rhetoric. To that blest painter external reality was a divine mystery to be stared  
*Plate 14*<sup>1</sup> at again and again till the commonest object—a pot, a tree, a new brick wall or the cowering figure of a beggarman—gave up its full charge of significance to be set down there and then. Nor did he lack the means. Though less elaborately equipped than the painters of the next age, he never once failed, so far as I know, for want of

<sup>1</sup> One is often surprised by the science of Giotto—the Renaissancelike efficiency of his drawing. It is the same with Fra Angelico who, to be sure, lived till 1455, and painted these Roman frescoes at the end of his life. But the verisimilitude of both masters comes not so much of technical science as of passionate observation. What excites Fra Angelico in this picture are the facts of the matter as he conceived it. He has scrupulously rendered every parcel of his vision—scrupulously and lovingly. Only in rendering the interior of the church has he made a modest attempt to display the new science, and unless I mistake he has bungled it. But if you will compare a figure by Mantegna—a master of the new science—with the back of this *cul-de-jatte*, you will probably feel that there is nothing to choose between them: both are perfectly beautiful. The woman with a baby on the left seems to fuse so happily the Giottesque tradition with Florentine *quattrocento* that it makes one laugh with pleasure. The naked toes of the cripple, deliberately elongated to give a sense of illness and hunger, I imagine, are perhaps as beautifully drawn as anything in the Vatican. The foot, I imagine, would be condemned as out of proportion by a royal academician: *tant mieux*. Did you notice the little child just under the cripple's arm, with its nose tip-tilted and one bright eye on the saint? One can enjoy touches of that sort when one has been sufficiently enchanted by Fra Angelico. And was ever anyone more blind than the blind man?



TINTORETTO

S. CATERINA





## IN THE VATICAN

technique. He is never inadequate to his problem, that of telling the truth about the emotional significance of things. I wonder whether anyone has had the idea of noting a kinsmanship between Fra Angelico and Chardin.

Visual facts, not notions about them, just what he saw (for he had seen angels and saints galore playing on tambourines and trumpets) were exciting enough for Fra Angelico, even as they had been for Giotto, even as they were to be for Renoir and Cézanne. And if, I mused, harking back to Tiepolo, the eighteenth-century painters preferred the world in fancy dress, it was for the world in fancy dress and not for grand generalizations about it that they felt their delicate sentiments. But for what did the heroes of the high Renaissance, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese (you will not forget that I had just come from Venice), care? Of course they cared for what they saw; no man or woman begins to be a painter whose vision is not abnormally sensitive. But what they saw they carried to some far chamber of the mind, wings and storeys removed from the original fact, and there from tepidescient experiences concocted their generalizations—attitudes and gestures and grimaces symbolizing love, hate, dignity, impudence, despair, surprise, wisdom, truth, justice and all the rest of the Graeco-Roman sculptor's or the film-producer's stock. And why not? A vision of life, raised some degrees above the ordinary, but conceived passionately as a whole, felt passionately in every detail, is as likely an argument for a work of art as a direct apprehension

## ENJOYING PICTURES

of the facts. Subject does not matter, nor problem either. Only when the abstract conception is uninspired as a whole or in detail unfelt, when generalizations are become mere ready-made features or blocks of ornament, when the vision is not only indirect but insincere, when the artist intends to excite us by his rendering but himself is not at all excited by what he renders, do classical compositions cease to be poetry and become rhetoric. Now Raffael, as during the next few weeks was to be borne in on me day after day, was excited by what he rendered. And that is why, between the Raffael *stanze* and the *Scuola di S. Rocco* lies all that difference which separates Milton from Samuel Johnson.

“Oh Western wind, when wilt thou blow  
That the small rain down can rain?  
Christ, that my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again!”

That is neither Milton nor Raffael; but perhaps it is Fra Angelico. Certainly it is not rhetoric; certainly it is poetry. It is as direct as possible and as close to the fact. It is primitive.

“Fate wings with ev’ry wish th’ afflictive dart,  
Each gift of nature and each grace of art;  
With fatal heat impetuous courage glows,  
With fatal sweetness elocution flows,  
Impeachment stops the speaker’s pow’rful breath  
And restless fire precipitates on death.”

*Plate 15*<sup>1</sup> That is Dr. Johnson, and it is not too bad—in my opinion

<sup>1</sup> I could easily have found a worse Tintoretto, the *Battle of Zara* in the Palazzo Ducale, for instance. But this happens to be representative—

## IN THE VATICAN

it is about as good as Tintoretto. But it is rhetoric. It is abstract; and there would be no harm in that if abstractions served to impose unity on incoherence. But these abstractions are declamatory; and the whole passage is grandiloquent. The symbols are ready-made symbols. Every epithet has come from the General Store and is as right as a spare part. So it is not surprising that the cry of despair is about as much like a genuine *cri de cœur* as the effusive welcome of a company-promoter is like—to keep the simile pure—*la politesse du cœur*.

“Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas  
Wash far away, wher ere they bones are hurl’d,  
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit’s the bottom of the monstrous world;  
Or whether thou to our moist vows deny’d,  
Sleep’st by the fable of Bellerus old.  
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount  
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona’s hold.  
Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth.  
And, O ye Dolphins, warft the hapless youth.”

representative of Tintoretto and of my grievance. The saint is registering emotion all right, just the emotion she was expected to register. And, my word! the ministering angel is ministering. He really could have put the wheel out of action without making such a mess of it; but the mess had to symbolize divine wrath and destruction—*quand le bon dieu s’y mette . . .* Here is the ‘afflictive dart’ with a vengeance, and ‘impetuous courage’ and ‘restless fire’ precipitating ‘death’. You will find these fine attitudes cropping up pretty regularly in high Renaissance art. They fit in anywhere, and you can order them by the foot, just as you can the renaissance ornament that our most successful architects glue on to the façades of their ferro-concrete buildings.



## ENJOYING PICTURES

Now that is abstract in a way; certainly it is not direct, but it is not rhetorical either. The primitive emotion has been carried to a far place and there converted to forms of splendour. But it is not rhetoric; the symbols are not ready-made, the epithets are vividly expressive. It is art in perfection. And so, I was to discover, are the *stanze* of Raffael. There are few things more pleasurable than discovering the obvious.

I shall go straight to the *Segnatura*. The first thing that came to me there this morning—I cannot tell why it came first—was a sudden recollection of Lesueur's decorations for the Hôtel Lambert which are now in the Louvre. This happened almost before the bewildering beauty of the room had broken on my senses, and the recollection aroused a curiosity which had to be satisfied before the receptive mood could prevail. It is impossible, said I, that Lesueur should never have seen this Parnassus group. Yet they say he never left France. "Marcantonio!" I exclaim incontinently. Yes, that is it: Marcantonio made engravings of these frescoes as soon as they were painted. At least I am almost sure he did, and for the moment I shall take it as sure to appease the kunstforsching daemon. And while I am arguing instead of feeling, let me get that little point of general criticism polished off too. Emphatically Raffael was not a rhetorician: this room alone, which is I suppose the perfect example of (still to be talking professionally) the data of visual experience elaborated to a conception,—a conception abstract, generalized, yet deeply



*Alinari photo*  
Vatican

PARNASSUS

RAFFAEL





## IN THE VATICAN

expressive—would prove it. But there is no question here of the artist being direct. These lovely forms, these significant movements and poses, have been carried a long way above matter of fact. They have been emptied of a good part of their humanity, and the void has been filled with an inhuman, an abstract, content. But they are not empty, or purely decorative, as those of Tintoretto or Veronese too often are, because Raffael felt for his world of abstractions as intensely and personally as Fra Angelico felt for his of monks and plaster walls, or Cézanne for his of apples and napkins, because Raffael charged his forms with emotion. As a matter of fact, there is also a certain humanity in Raffael's pictures, there are relations, visual relations, of one human being to another; of them I had better speak later.

You need only look attentively to be sure that Raphael has lived on Parnassus. Also he has been happy there— *Plate 16* so happy that he must tell the world. No rhetor, exhibiting his erudition, would have fitted Apollo with a fiddle. Apollo, as school-boys used to know, played the lyre; but Italians of the Renaissance did not. Raffael painted what he conceived as he conceived it, a vision of loveliness sensible to the eye of that enchanting mind. You would not expect him to reconstruct Paradise in the manner of a German professor, would you? It is Apollo and his fiddle that take the eye first when it catches at something definite in the general bewilderment of beauty. This atmosphere of beauty, which charms without agitating,



## ENJOYING PICTURES

and pervades the whole room with sweetness, is unlike anything I ever experienced elsewhere. The colours are said by experts—and experts must be credited till they can be put down, as they often can be—to have faded; probably they have, they are adequate to their purpose all the same. They make one divinely happy. I doubt whether I am capable of feeling more than I felt on coming into the *Segnatura* this morning—for art I mean. Similarly the impression of beauty given by this particular fresco (*The Parnassus*) will be accounted unique by anyone who happens not yet to have glanced at *The School of Athens*. It is the beauty of Spring, without the East winds and sleet-showers; it is late May in Rome. It is the first week of the high Renaissance, before the high midsummer pomps come on. And it is spring in the mind of Raffael. I never realized before how personal an artist he was. Look as closely as you can—it is not easy to see the details—at those two figures on Apollo's right, one leaning her

*Plate 17* head on the shoulder of the other; consider only their plastic relationship, for I will say nothing yet of Raffael's humanity: look at the drawing of the hair of the more upstanding figure; look at her shoulder with its exquisite pattern: peer into the lovely hatched painting of the face and neck: for here, it seems to me, you have a first taste of that adorable temperament, boyish yet magisterial, lyrical yet thorough, which was Raffael's when first he came to Rome.

The sprawling woman at the foot of the composition



RAFFAEL

PARNASSUS (DETAIL)

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican



## IN THE VATICAN

(left side) is called Sappho. I am glad Raffael thought of her like that, with a top-curl and a manuscript. It seems too good to be true, but it is a fact that Raffael was himself in love at this time, in love not with life only but with a particular woman, so much in love that he had to break into verse like the rest of us. What is more, he scribbled his verses on his drawings. For instance, there is a fragment under the mitred head of a bishop in a drawing for the *Disputa* (you can see it in Vienna) which begins thus:

"lingua or di parlar disoglio el nodo  
a dir di questo diletoso ingano  
ch'amor mi fece per mio grave afanno . . ."

"Now tongue of mine  
Must I untie the knot of speech to tell  
Of that enchanting snare for me prepared  
By love, to my sad loss. . . ."

So that was what he was thinking about while he decorated the *Segnatura*; no wonder it is the most lyrical of all his lovelinesses. I am sorry to say that if you read the whole sonnet, to be found on another drawing (in the British Museum), especially if you read it in Roman type, as printed and improved by a Herr Grimm, a German kunstforscher, you will find that the fragment loses that mystery which pertains to fragments and that the whole thing falls rather flat. It is satisfactory, however, to note that the master is sorry, not glad, that when dusk gave an opening for deeds rather than words, he missed his chance.

Meanwhile, musing on these adventitious entertain-



## ENJOYING PICTURES

ments, I have allowed my eye to wander along the window on which rests Sappho's arm to pick up the counterpoising figures, from whom admiration starts upward to that famous turning figure of a woman. There she is turning her back to us and just not looking over her shoulder. How well one remembers it, or rather how well one thinks one remembers, until returning to Rome one is dumbfounded by unrecollected beauties. It has been imitated, and well imitated, a thousand times. But what other artist has given what Raffael gives, the sense of a divine being, turning musically in the Paradise of music and emanating music as she turns? Perhaps I had better talk about something else.

I said that the beauty of the *Segnatura* was satisfying without being agitating. And I was thinking, amongst other things, of that spell it casts which prevents one feeling in a hurry. Too often my happiness in a gallery with which I am ill acquainted is stupidly impaired by a feeling that I must get on or I shall never have time to see all the sights that are waiting for me round the corner. I am like a child in a sweet-shop who bolts the chocolates to get on to the nougat. The spell cast by the *Segnatura* is soothing. Also the *stanza* is a single room, which does not seem so very large—though it is; one feels that one has plenty of time. At least I do. Nevertheless I shall turn

*Plate 18* now and have a look at the *School of Athens*.

Most people, I believe, once they have recovered from the first shock, fasten on the figure lying across the steps



*Alinari photo*  
Vatican

SCHOOL OF ATHENS

RAFFAEL



## IN THE VATICAN

in the middle of the picture. I seem to remember that the guide calls it 'Diogenes'. I have no idea whether he has any good reason for doing so; neither, for that matter, am I sure that my memory is trustworthy. But it amuses me to notice how eager are all the tourists to be told the names of the different figures. If this anxiety arose from a desire to know how Raffael conceived the sages of antiquity, I could understand it. But as they receive the information before they have had time to study the picture and depart the moment they have received it, it cannot be that. I rather fancy they have some notion that Raffael knew better than we what Plato and Aristotle looked like, perhaps because they think he was their contemporary. Even then one would expect them to stay and take another glance after they had been enlightened. Anyhow the fact of their curiosity remains, and to me it is a little puzzling.

The two dominating figures—Plato and Aristotle let me tell you, though at one time they were taken for Peter and Paul—always disappoint me. They serve chiefly, so far as I am concerned, to demonstrate the extraordinary effect of space created by the retreating arches. Should your eye be carried inwards by these you will lose yourself for a while in the tone of the atmospheric distance: should it stop short, you will be quietly enchanted by the more exquisite tone of the marble background and the statue of Apollo. This morning mine was immediately arrested by the old bald-headed gentleman arguing on the left, who looks like Verlaine and is said to be Socrates, and Socrates

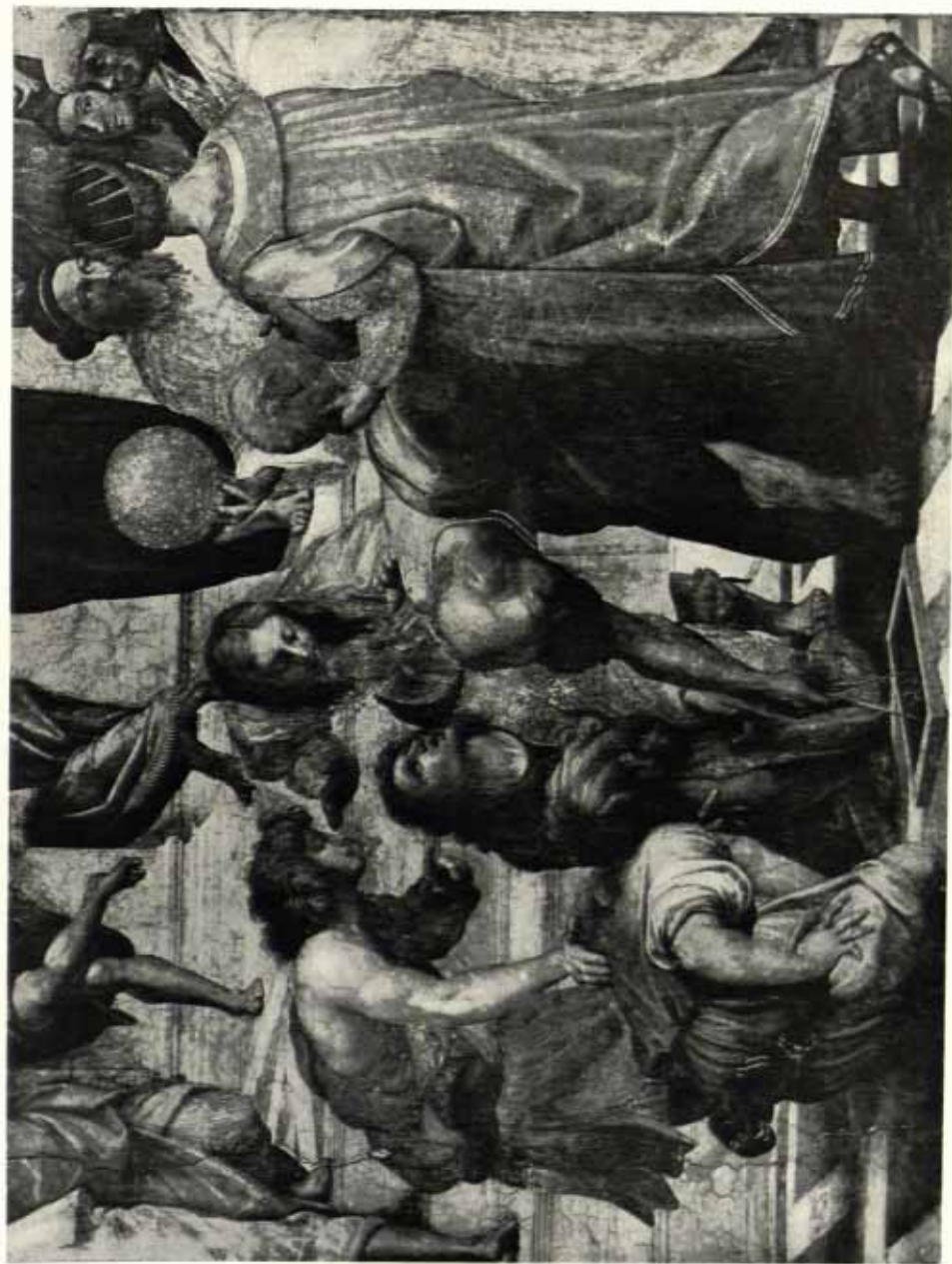


## ENJOYING PICTURES

I think he must be because he is arguing with that singularly handsome young person in uniform who I feel sure is Alcibiades. If I do not say that this is the most lovely group in the picture it is because I save up the pleasure of making that ridiculous affirmation till I come to the group in the right-hand bottom corner—the geometers. The figure of Alcibiades, as I choose to call him, makes me think of Pintoricchio—*The Return of Odysseus* in the National Gallery, the Library at Siena; and that turns out to be quite in order, the adolescent Raffael having worked under Pintoricchio. But it seems unnatural to think of single figures in this fresco so perfectly are the forms related. One sees groups and related groups. For instance, the Socrates group cannot, without an effort, be dissociated from the standing figures on its right or the crowd below. Amongst these (the lower group) the pale upstanding figure, immediately below Alcibiades, moves me profoundly by its calm insistent beauty, a repose accentuated by that eager head, with gloriously back-flying hair, of the youth on the extreme left. And how fascinatingly modelled is that vine-crowned potter of whom you can make little or nothing in this photograph.

The dearest thrill of all, however, the most unchallengeable beauty, awaits us in the right-hand bottom corner.

*Plate 19* Here are the geometers; a group that cannot be separated plastically from the two figures, especially the legs of the two figures, leaning against the wall above them, or from the pale figure mounting the steps, or from the lower



RAFFAEL

SCHOOL OF ATHENS (DETAIL)

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican



## IN THE VATICAN

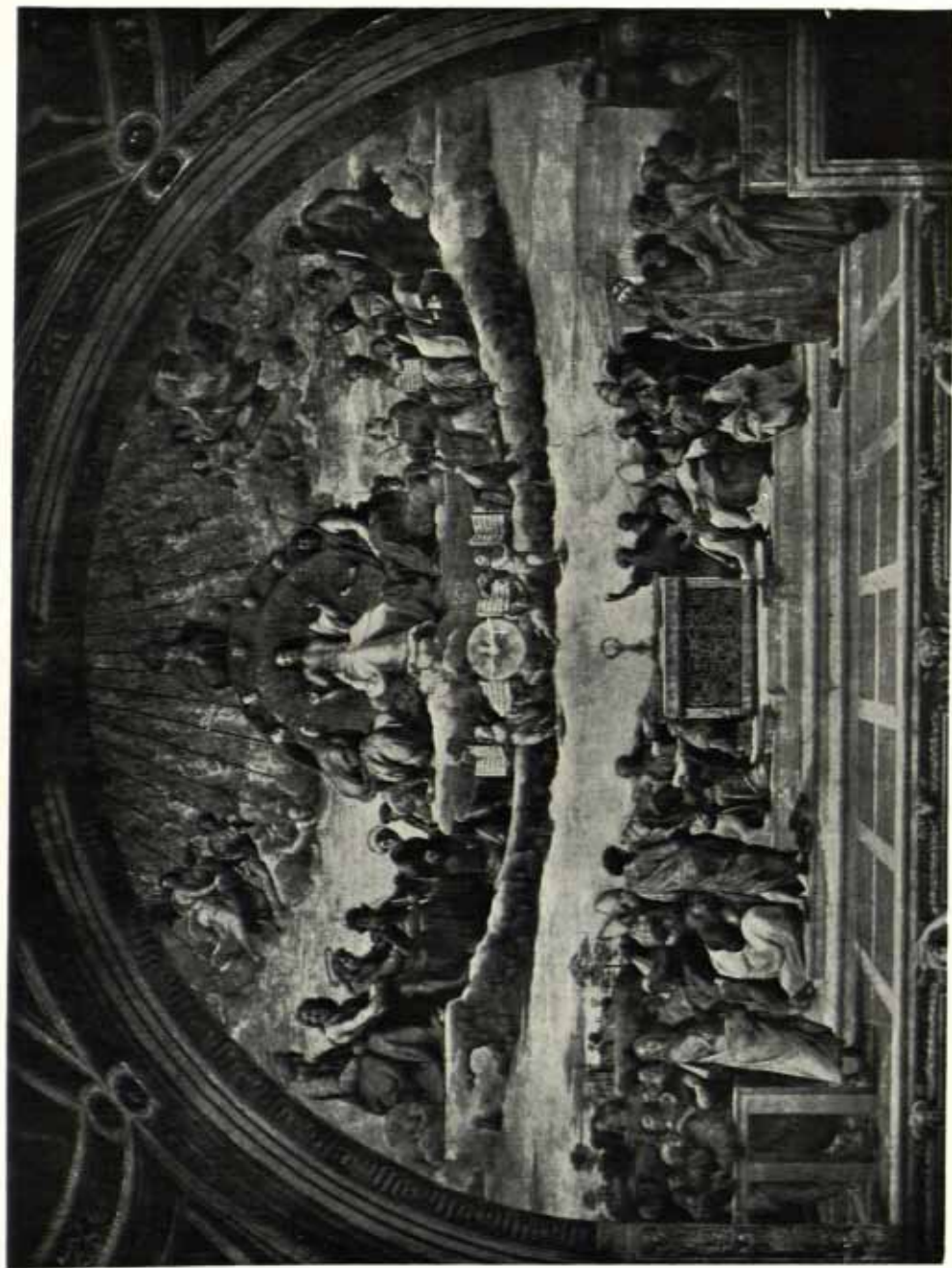
part of the figure just above him (the upper part belongs more properly to another grouping), nor yet from that tall, black, impressive, pointerlike figure. Yet none of these, I am given to understand, has any literary connexion with the geometricians; which shows how easily you can go off the rails once you begin to allow the cognitive element in a picture to guide your appreciation of the design. The beauties of form and colour in the variously contorted figures of these geometers, master and pupils, their expressiveness, their grace, their convincing reference to a world as real as ours but grander, surpass all words of description—of mine at any rate. Were they one jot less than perfect as pure forms we should begin to rave about their human beauty; about the blonde head of the boy bent over the diagram, or the adorable intelligence of that gentle child opening hands and arms in an ecstasy of understanding as the cogency of the argument dawns upon him. Indeed it is impossible not to be reminded of, not to realize at last, the setting of a Platonic dialogue and the golden-aged charm of Socrates' youths. But over such hints and realizations one should not let the mind linger, for that way irrelevance lies. This human beauty does no more than add a childish delight to pure aesthetic ecstasy that has long since transcended pleasure. Of the more austere loveliness of the four figures standing just behind the master, in the very corner of the picture—again an integral part of the group composition but not of the group consciousness—I shall say nothing, or only that it



## ENJOYING PICTURES

always gives me a little adscititious thrill to know that the head of a young man, dreamy and thoughtful, was ever reckoned a good likeness of Raffael himself: also that the sly, witty fellow beside him is thought to be Sodoma.

- Between *The School of Athens* and *La Disputa* (first painted of all the big mural frescoes) there is very definitely something to choose. Whether my choice is determined to some extent by the fact that I prefer the classical Renaissance to medieval theology is more than I can say. What is to the point is that, at the age of twenty-five, Raffael, who was passionately in love with the brave new
- Plate 20* world, had his preferences assuredly. *La Disputa* is so glorious a work that even to adumbrate detraction would perhaps be a sign of aesthetic insensibility. On the contrary, I would urge the heretic to contemplate the figure of Christ, the group to the right of the altar of which the perfect writing figure is the centre, or the smiling head of the pointing figure in the foreground on the left, and see with what confidence he can assert that here is any great inferiority to the finest passages in *The School*.
- Plate 21* No: if analysis there is to be, it must be enthusiastic. Only I do think one has a right to say that the whole fresco, majestic as it is, has been executed with less ardour and less delight than either the *Parnassus* or the *School of Athens*; which is not to deny that it has been executed with more ardour and more delight and more science—by which I mean more comprehension of how a work of art can be brought without romantic emphasis to



RAFFAEL.

LA DISPUTA

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican



## IN THE VATICAN

the highest pitch of expressiveness—than almost any picture by any other painter. About this time (1509-16) it seems as though Raffael could do no wrong. Somehow he combines the lyricism of Keats, with the scholarly perfection of Milton and the ease of an Elizabethan songwriter, which is pitching it strong I admit, but what less would you say? He was passionately excited by both objects and ideas; he was in love with life, astonished by his own power of execution and invention, and fascinated by the possibilities, not so much of paint, as of line and colour. But I question whether the artist who humanized the medieval madonna was much interested in theology. However, he was employed by a Pope, that grasping old termagant Julius II, to decorate the Vatican; and the implications of the commission can hardly have escaped him. Also I cannot doubt that they irked him sometimes. If the fact is not apparent in *La Disputa* (incidentally, that fresco has nothing to do with a dispute but celebrates the triumph of the Catholic church), it is unmistakable in the next room, *La stanza d'Eliodoro*.

When I said that Raffael was more excited by the rediscovery of civilization than by the flotsam and jetsam of the Dark Ages, it was of the Stanza d'Eliodoro that I was thinking chiefly. Coming into it from anywhere but the Segnatura I should probably have been disarmed by the prevailing beauty; coming, as I did, from next door—and not from the Constantino—my first thought was that Raffael sometimes nodded. Yes, he nodded in the Eliodoro



## ENJOYING PICTURES

sometimes; at any rate he plodded. He plodded so heavily that, in the fresco that represents the confrontation of Attila by Leo I, you catch him once or twice with feet well planted on the road which for four hundred years academic painters were to tread with infinite fatigue, if

*Plate 22* not to themselves, to us. Look at Attila himself and the man who holds his horse, look at the man holding a horse in the very middle of the foreground, here we have a taste of that stodgy, wooden Romanism never to be found in the Segnatura and still to be found in the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Raffael helped himself freely to what time had left of classical art, but as a rule he perfectly assimilated his helpings. Almost always what he gives is not Rome but Raffael. Here, however, are Romanisms frankly undigested. The artist, we feel, was bored, and, imagination answering neither to whip nor cajolery, could do no better than transcribe. One cannot choose but remember that in the very months during which he was elaborating this disappointing masterpiece, he was creating for Agostino Chigi that lovely fresco of Galatea—perhaps

*Plate 23*<sup>1</sup> the most lovely of all his works. The moral scarce needs drawing: by the poetry of Greece Raffael was otherwise inspired than by the legends of the primitive church. And yet one should count something more than the proverbial ten before speaking ill of any work by this master. Always one is forced to take back a good part of

<sup>1</sup> I am not going to say anything about this picture. As the young ladies used to say—it is too lovely for words.



RAFFAEL

LA DISPUTA (DETAIL)

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican



## IN THE VATICAN

what one has said. I have only to look to the left of the central figure to be confounded by the Pope on his white mule, with the attendant cardinals on theirs, and behind them a Roman landscape featuring the Colosseum. Few details are more pleasing than this papal group. And as for the princes of the apostles rushing through the sky, they are worthy almost of being admitted to the school of Athens.

The fact is the left-hand side of this picture is much superior to the right. Why this should be I cannot tell; for I believe it can be proved that the whole is by the master, in so far as anything can be proved to be wholly by him. In judging pictures ascribed to Raffael, however, it is more than usually important to be guided by nothing but genuine emotion. He whose critical faculties are at the service of names and attributions is likely to come a cropper. For consider: Raffael died at the age of thirty-seven, having made himself responsible for an amount of work that might have filled three normal lives. In addition to the vast decorations carried out for the popes, he painted, or accepted responsibility for, scores of pictures for churches, monasteries and private patrons. He was prodigal of drawings. For years he was in charge of the rebuilding of St. Peter's, and this he esteemed his principal undertaking. He supervised officially all excavations and researches carried out within a ten-mile radius of S. Peter's, reported on them, and by many cognoscenti was more valued as an archaeologist than as a painter. Moreover he built houses,



## ENJOYING PICTURES

laid out cartoons for hangings, and even tried his hand at sculpture. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he should have employed a host of pupils and coadjutors, who worked with him on his walls and canvases sometimes, sometimes in his studio by themselves, from studies sometimes and sometimes depending on nothing more than a slight sketch, if indeed they depended on anything beyond their memories and mother wit. Many so-called Raffaels were not finished till after the master's death; and some were not begun. Vasari tells us (let experts read and tremble) that when Giulio Romano, who collaborated with Raffael on the portrait of Clement VII, was shown seven years later the copy made by Andrea del Sarto, he was unable to decide whether it was a copy or the original. Apparently even in the jointly painted picture there was not enough of the master to give that authentic flavour which the copy presumably lacked. Of these two portraits the one disfavoured by the experts is now at Naples, the other in the Pitti. No one has the right to say for certain which is by the firm of Raffael & Co. and which by Andrea del Sarto, though needless to say each is claimed stridently as "the original" and each has its professional backers. Consider all this, consider that much of Raffael's work, even in the Vatican, has been odiously restored by Carlo Maratta and other boobies, and you will find it easier to remember, when you dislike something attributed to Raffael or feel disappointed, that the chances are about ten to one that it is not by Raffael at all.



Alinari photo  
Vatican

ATTILA

RAFFAEL





## IN THE VATICAN

Oh those experts! I will ease my heart of them, in season or out. How often have I heard them assert without a tremor of humility that one part of a picture was by a master and another by his pupil, when both happened to have been dead these four or five hundred years; whereas before a decoration on which two living artists had collaborated, unerringly they have attributed A's part to B and B's to A. Such impudence in a literary critic or a scholar—and neither scholars nor literary critics are famous for modesty—is unthinkable. I have heard an expert of world-wide reputation dismiss an attribution to Velasquez with the words—"That's not good enough for Velasquez." As if Velasquez, or anyone else, never painted badly. Fine results we should get if such methods were applied to the plays of Shakespeare! A few years ago two rubbishy little pictures belonging to Lord Conway of Allington were pronounced Giorgiones, painted by that artist at the age of fourteen or fifteen—I forget which. The only evidence I heard for this remarkable attribution was that the landscapes could be identified as representing scenes near Castelfranco, and that Giorgione might have been familiar with them when he was a boy. So might his old nanny, or his little sister if he had one, or anyone else; and assuredly anyone might have painted these insignificant scraps. Can you imagine a reputable literary critic identifying a bit of Elizabethan common form as the work of Shakespeare at the age of fourteen because there was a reference in it to some landmark near Stratford? It would



## ENJOYING PICTURES

be less preposterous, however; for in making attributions to Shakespeare we have something solid to work upon, whereas there are only about five pictures certainly known to be by Giorgione. And think of ascribing anything, on anything less than the surest documentary evidence, to an artist at the age of fourteen. Think of your own productions at that age. There is, however, a simple explanation of these apparent mysteries. Money talks. If a scholar can prove that a few lines of *Henry VI* are unquestionably by Shakespeare, the publishers will not get a penny more for their editions; but by calling poor little smudges Giorgiones or Raffaels an expert enhances their price a thousandfold.

At the end of the *stanza d' Eliodoro* is the glorious *Mass of Bolsena*. As in the Parnassus, in this picture, which also spans a window, the problem imposed by architectural necessity has been turned to brilliant account, so brilliant that nothing could look more easy and inevitable than this *tour de force*. If you still have a little enthusiasm left and want to feel again how Raffael composed and drew when he gave his mind to it, take a look at the heads of the two

*Plate 24* Swiss guards on the right of the window and then at the

*Plate 25* group balancing them on the other side. Anything better drawn (look for instance at the woman with her back to you and her hair in a curious coil), better painted or more artfully arranged I cannot remember or imagine. Should your eye drop to the Caryatids in grisaille on the socle below you will probably come to the conclusion that they have been repainted—but not, I think,



RAFFAEL

GALATEA

*Alinari photo*  
Farnesina



## IN THE VATICAN

recently repainted. The ceiling, which is supposed to be by that admirable and much despised Francesco Penni, is a great favourite of mine.

Heaven knows I had no intention of dragging you back to-day to the *stanza del'Incendio*. I take it for granted you are as tired as I am. Besides, the most part of it was not painted by Raffael; and my secret reason for going there would be to pick a quarrel by pointing out that Raffael can beat Michelangelo at his own game, that of drawing the human body in violent action. One might enjoy too that discreditable and undeniable pleasure of taking masters down a peg or two by observing how freely both Plate 26 David and Ingres have helped themselves from this fire-scene. It is a pity that the figure of a woman leading a child up the steps is so difficult to make out from the floor; for it is one of Raffael's finest single figures. If ever you should have the luck to be there when workmen are about try to persuade them—it is not very difficult if you have ten lire to spare—to let you climb up a ladder. I feel sure you will be astounded by the beauty of this figure, and by the exquisiteness of a whole group (the mounting woman and the kneeling figures above her) which, from a distance, has an air of mere padding. And while you are perched aloft, you may as well glance across the room at the fresco over the window, *The Oath of Purgation*, if only for the instructive fun of comparing the Swiss guards—again in the right-hand bottom corner—with those of the *Mass of Bolsena*. Here, I conjecture, we have another example of



## ENJOYING PICTURES

the restorer's tricks, and not of an early restorer either. Surely there is something a little too Swiss about these Switzers? Granted the original was not by the master, I strongly suspect the pupils even have been victims of foul play. Could the culprit have been some German Herr Professor who, having passed through Nuremberg and Munich on his way to Rome, was humming *Meistersinger* at his work?

But I have had enough of it and so have you; also the master has been so kind as to provide a retreat for those who have had enough. The *loggie* were never intended for exhausting admiration; they were to provide a promenade, a *passeggio*, where people could saunter with the grotesques on one hand, the Bible overhead, and on the other a view over the city and campagna away to the Alban hills. One is not allowed to smoke there unfortunately. Let us go all the same; for going perhaps I shall be suffered to explain what I meant just now when I said that there was a certain humanity in Raffael's pictures.

I admit that Raffael does describe certain human relations, the relation for instance between mother and child. But observe that when he succeeds the relationships described are always purely visual. They are of a kind that can be apprehended only by the eye and rendered only in line and colour. And this is the only kind of human relations that visual artists have ever rendered successfully. Raffael is not singular. Many, though by no means most, great artists have dealt in humanities: none, I believe, has



*Alinari photo*  
Vatican

MASS OF BOLSENA (DETAIL)

RAFFAEL



## IN THE VATICAN

succeeded in rendering relationships which were not of this peculiar order. You will have noticed that an observant and sensitive person, even though he or she be not a painter, sometimes can tell by the look of another person what that person is feeling. Now that other person is expressing by his appearance something that could not be expressed anyhow else; if he put it into words or music the shade of emotion would be altered: it is something visually expressible only, a feeling appropriate to a form. A visual artist could render that expressive appearance but only in terms of appearance, in line and colour that is to say. Thus we can note the bridges between the model and the amateur of painting: what the model felt induced a peculiar look or movement, which look or movement made the artist feel something; what the artist felt stung him to expression; and that expression provoked aesthetic excitement in the amateur. All the bridges you perceive are purely visual. The whole transaction is carried through in the domain of visual art.

In the Sistine Madonna—to take for example a *Plate 27*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Sistine Madonna, like the Gioconda and Gray's Elegy, is one of those works of art that are too well and too early known. It is almost impossible to think of it as a picture and not as something that hung in the night-nursery. Unfortunately at Dresden it is treated much as the German governess treated it when she was trying to *épater* the curate. In the shrine of the idol religious silence is imposed. If you can shake yourself clear of the shackles of childish familiarity and the atmosphere of bogus culture you will be rewarded by the appropriate thrill; for the Sistine Madonna is beautiful though oily. Out of three imposing masses the artist has created a design of incredible amplitude. The two little *putti* at the foot of the picture round



## ENJOYING PICTURES

picture which everyone knows—there is a human relationship between mother and child. There is something which is not, as I formerly supposed, purely a matter of lines and colours. It is something, however, which can be expressed in line and colour alone. It cannot be expressed in any other way; and all attempts to express it otherwise, in words for instance, end always in pure nonsense. It is of those sentiments which, though felt in the heart, can be externalized only in forms, recognized only by the eye, and recorded only by an appeal to the eye, which are, therefore, the peculiar property of the graphic and plastic arts. Attempts to render in these arts relations that can be expressed in words end as badly as end all attempts to express in words relations specifically visual. Let *The Transfiguration* (the lower half) in the gallery hard by be my first witness, and almost any description by Ruskin my second.

By now we have chattered our way through the *sala di Constantino*, which was not decorated by Raffael though seemingly some guides still believe that it was, and are come to the *loggie*. How many of the brush-strokes here are actually by the hand of Raffael I do not know. Always one is coming on passages that one would gladly believe were by the master; but, knowing as I do, that not until the nineteenth century was glass fitted into the arches (till

off the composition admirably, besides reminding us in this den of dumb sooth-seekers that art is something to be enjoyed. The modelling of the child is a miracle of suavity and science.



RAFFAEL

MASS OF BOLSENA (DETAIL)

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican



## IN THE VATICAN

quite lately Italians themselves seem to have imagined that they enjoyed a warm, dry climate), I cannot suppose that much of the original painting—and most of that was by pupils—has survived. Nevertheless the whole effect is delicious. Can anything be gayer or more whimsical or more elegant—unless it be the Farnesina? And where did Raffael see Pompeian paintings that he thus out-Pompeyed Napoleon and his imperial decorators? I think I can answer that, and give you a taste of my learning to boot; for I happen to know that at this very moment they were unearthing those highly “Pompeian” paintings in the ruins of the baths of Titus. Well then, how got he wind of eighteenth-century *Chinoiseries*, you say. I suggest that what were called “chinoiseries” towards the end of the eighteenth century owed something to Rome as well as to China. Let us just look at the ceiling for one moment to see whether we cannot feel the authentic touch in *The Creation of Eve* and *Plate 28 The Fall*—for my part I prefer them almost to Michelangelo’s versions—and whether we do not catch a breath of superior inspiration in the design of *The Finding of Moses*, *David and Goliath* and *Bathsheba*. If, perversely, you pretend rather to find a touch of David in *The Judgment of Solomon* I am in too good humour to protest. But I must tell you that, though I know it is wildly improbable that Raffael ever put his brush to a single *Plate 29* one of the grotesques, I adore them all.





*On the Foregoing*



### *On the Foregoing*

“KEEP your hair on,” shouted the urchins at infuriated old gentlemen who, in the spacious days of good Queen Vic, had been hit in the eye by a snowball. I wonder no one has shouted it at me denouncing the apathy of our aediles or the cowardice of museum officials. Perhaps someone has, when I was too angry to listen. And probably, while reading these essays, several of my American friends have murmured, “Come off it.” Yet I am not one to lose such hair as he has for a trifle, neither am I addicted to riding high horses. Rarely do I excite myself about trivial things, and to me most things are trivial. If I get excited about art, therefore, it must be because to me art is important.

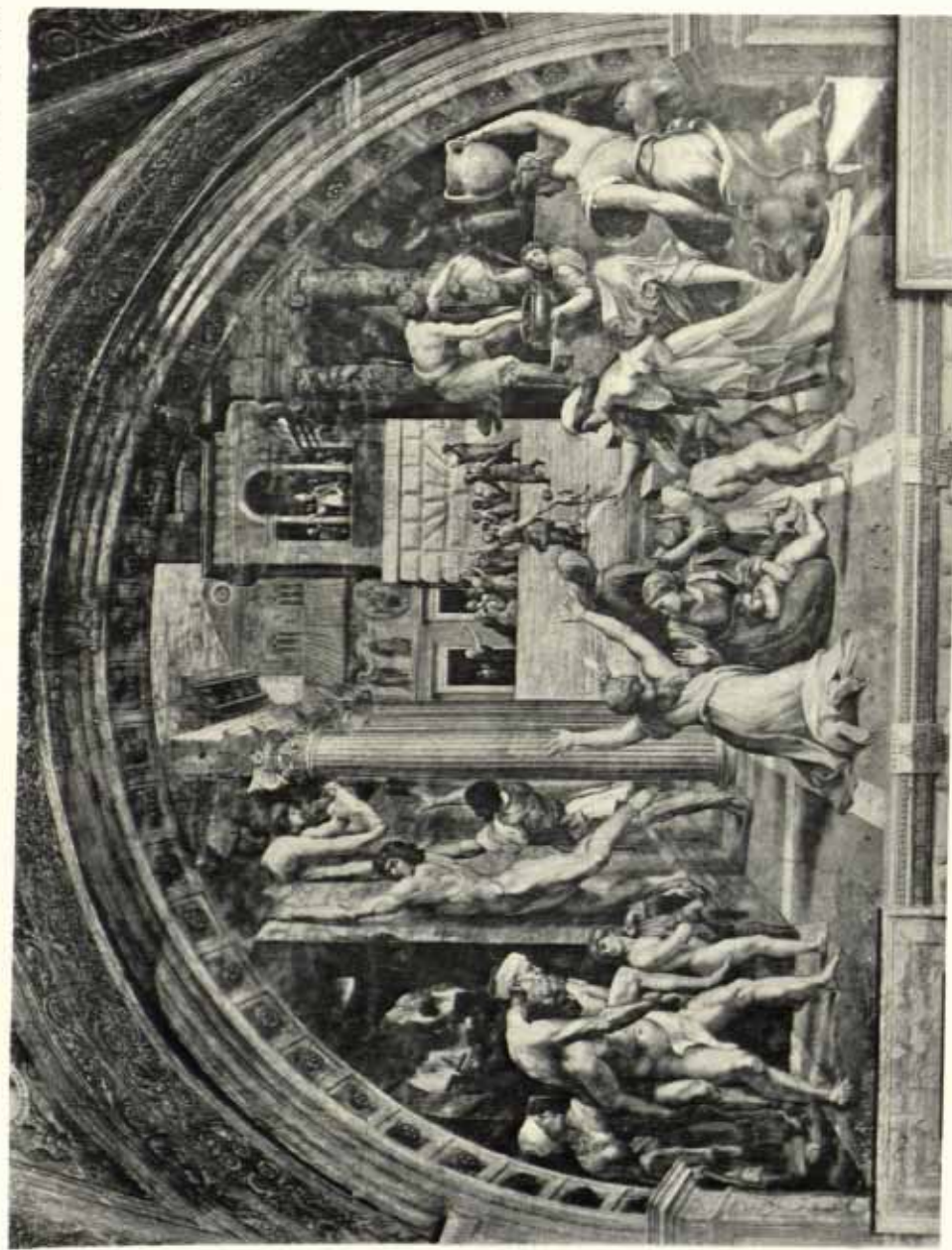
To be exact, art seems to me one of the three important things in the world: the other two are love and thought. These are the three absolutes, or more precisely, immediate means, conducive to states of mind that need no justification. A man might live by any of them; but, for my part, I can live by only one. I shall not be so humble as to pretend that I have never known the ecstasies of pure thought; but I am prudent enough to confess at once that I lack the intellectual power and subtlety which enables a few to live by thought alone. Love, the most intense of



## ENJOYING PICTURES

all human experiences—you will bear in mind, will you not, that this essay makes no claim to be based on anything but personal experience controlled carefully and honestly consulted?—is unluckily also the most unstable. It has the drawback of depending on somebody else; for it takes two to make much of a love-affair. Certainty and permanence are the things we most desire in love, and the only certain thing about it is that it won't endure. Now the ecstasies of art have this immense advantage, they depend only on one human sensibility and an almost inexhaustible supply of inanimate objects. Art's efficacy, I admit, is subject to accidents. A splashing cold in the head precludes all joy in pictures; and when my temperature rises above 101° poetry for me becomes as insignificant as push-pin. My aesthetic sensibility is at the mercy of physical ills, of an exposed nerve or a searching colic. Also I do not think, were I genuinely hungry—nothing better for the appetite than a brisk hour in a picture-gallery—but were I hungry as possibly no one in England is, as assuredly millions in Russia are, I do not think I should be likely to lose myself in an "O Altitudol!" before the finest picture ever painted.

You may take it from me, however, that to have one's happiness at the mercy of the gastric juices or of one of those little cavities the dentists are so clever at finding, is a blessed state than having it at the mercy of a woman. And if art cannot prevail against a disordered or an empty stomach, at least it has power to raise one above the minor miseries of life, domestic vexations, overdrafts, small



RAFFAEL

INCENDIO

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican





## ON THE FOREGOING

jealousies and crosses, and defective water-pipes. But these acts of grace art will perform only for those who take it seriously. And only those can be said truly to take art seriously who test all things, save only pure thought and love (which can and does take care of itself and about which I shall have little or nothing to say) by their relation to and effect on art. This is what opens the unbridgeable gulf between them and the rest of the world. For artists and aesthetes are found in the last analysis to take the world and all that in it is (always excepting pure thought and personal affection) as means to their end. No one of course lives every moment of his or her day for art alone. But just as the saint regards this world merely as a means to the next, so people who take art seriously regard it, in their hearts, only as a means to love, thought or some kind of aesthetic experience. This is a secret not to be worn on the sleeve: like sincere Christians thorough aesthetes pass months and years amongst their fellows without betraying it. But sooner or later the scandal will out, the exasperating fact that these peculiar people regard what most consider immensely important as of very little consequence or none.

Thus, of some social or economic reform they will suddenly inquire, waking up and taking notice as it were, "Does it make for the creation or appreciation of art? Will it improve for artists the chance of living freely and creatively? Will it help the aesthete to enjoy?" The fact that it may possibly augment the amusements and satisfactions of people incapable of such activities and experiences



## ENJOYING PICTURES

moves them hardly at all; for the fate of a million coolies is, for them, as nothing compared with the fate of one creative artist.

If anyone were to ask me this morning (April 12th, 1933) what I thought of the goings on in Germany, I should probably reply that I disliked them intensely but that these were early days to condemn a movement which might well develop into something as reasonable and efficient as Italian fascism. And then I read this in *The Times*: Dr. Goebbels (replying to Furtwängler) said that he realized more than the one distinction in art proposed by the eminent conductor—the distinction between good art and bad; no art (contends the politician) which does not emanate from the full national life can in the end be good or mean anything to the nation for which it is created; there must be no 'absolute' art of the kind known to liberal democracy; besides being good, art must also be responsible, in close touch with the people, and aggressive: which read, I know that I am anti-Hitler. Why, even in Italy, where I have had occasion and good reason to admire the efficiency and moderation of the régime, when I consider that an endeavour to divert art and thought into patriotic channels has poisoned the sources of spiritual life, and that art and thought which must be free or die being unfree are dying, I find myself at heart a rebel. Were I an Italian peasant or shop-keeper I should be fascist; being what I am, one of those queer people who take art seriously, I am not.



RAFFAEL

SISTINE MADONNA

*Alinari photo*  
Dresden





## ON THE FOREGOING

Moreover, not only do we judge politics, economics and social organization in relation to art, we interpret life as a means. Always we are on the look-out for new possibilities of aesthetic experience. Art is our food, and the creation of art as important to us as agriculture to a hungry people. It is idiotic to call this attitude right or wrong; it is generally idiotic to introduce those words into a discussion of this sort. It is a fact, just as physical hunger and thirst are facts. Useless to deplore them, though physical hunger and thirst have before now upset the calculations of well-meaning people. This spiritual hunger is as real as physical. Assuredly it is not universal; it is not common even; on the contrary it is exceedingly rare. That is why, from the governmental point of view, artists and aesthetes are the most inoffensive and inconsiderable of citizens. It exists nevertheless; what is more, it is subjection to this singular craving that separates people who take art seriously from the rest of mankind.

So far I have written of the people who take art seriously as though they composed a homogeneous class. They do not. People who are vulgarly accused of the practice can be divided into four groups, only two of which, as I hope to show, belong properly to that minute and unloved minority. It cannot be denied that both artists and aesthetes do take art seriously, though, as we shall see, in their attitude to art and life they differ widely. But 'cultivated people' and craftsmen, who are generally supposed to be tarred with the same brush, are perhaps



## ENJOYING PICTURES

not tarred at all. At least I shall show reason for doubting whether they deserve to be. I shall show reason for doubting whether they take art seriously as artists and aesthetes take it.

Consider first the artist, the creator. His offence is not so much a lust to enjoy a particular kind of experience as an itch to express himself. For him the whole of existence is potential matter for self-assertion. As a rule he cannot rest long in contemplation on account of an irresistible urge to describe what he is feeling. Only when confronted by something so completely and finally expressive that there is nothing more to be said about it, in other words by a perfect work of art, can he abandon himself to his sense of beauty unmindful of turning it to account. An artist will be for ever wishing to improve on raw experience by imagination, by more intense realization, by analysis, simplification and order; for in doing so he renders his interpretation of experience, by creating his own equivalent he expresses himself. Only before something that admits of no improvement, an experience completely realized and perfectly expressed, can he be calmly appreciative: only off a perfect work of art can he keep his hands.

The aesthete feels no such call to pass from contemplation to creation; but I will confess that he has his spasms of self-assertiveness too. By works of art he is struck into contemplative acquiescence; but common life, external reality in the raw, possesses no such awful magic and



RAFFAEL

EVE

*Altair photo*  
Vatican





## ON THE FOREGOING

imposes no humility. With life he will be playing always, digging below its surface, and twisting what he finds into rudimentary forms of art from which he can obtain some of the coveted stimulant. No more than the artist will he take life as he finds it.<sup>1</sup> Always he is judging, often rejecting. Life to be worth living must be liveable in terms of art: experience that cannot be brought to stimulation-point and interpreted as tragedy, comedy, romance, spectacular beauty, lyrical loveliness, or rattling farce is unacceptable. As for finished works of art, the aesthete adores them for their immediate gift of glory; he also depends on them to provide a taste for living, just as I, in the National Gallery, depended on the grand aesthetic thrill to keep alive the aesthetic mood.

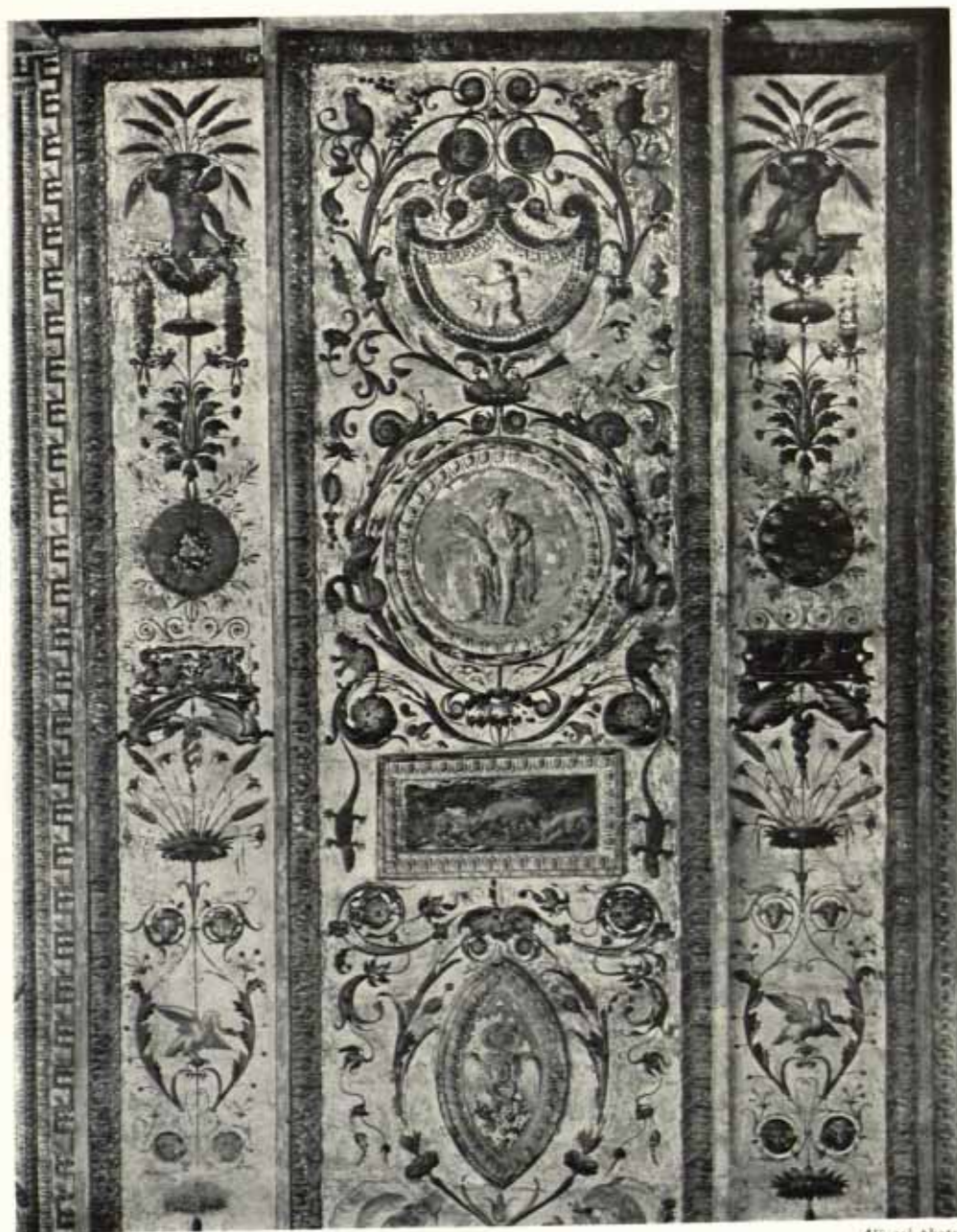
The public is still surprised that so many delicate aesthetes, understanding and fastidious critics maybe, have painted nothing better than insignificant pictures or published the feeblest of poems. The public should consider more deeply the difference between artists and critics. The creator with the lust of possession on him either seizes the object and shakes the life out of it or subtly steals its soul away. The aesthete can only tamper with his raw material.

<sup>1</sup> One often hears artists described as people who take life as they find it. In the sense that artists, finding in life as it is all the material they require, are unlikely to bother themselves much about making the world a better place, this no doubt is true. But in another sense, a person whose very *raison d'être* is to convert crude experience into expressive forms can hardly be said to take life as it comes. To select is to criticize. To improve on facts is to judge them.



## ENJOYING PICTURES

Certainly he can penetrate to the heart of a work of art in which the emotive elements have already been separated by the artist from the unessential and furthermore have been ordered for his apprehension. But before crude nature he can do no more than what I described him doing in the last paragraph. Something he can make of it; but something which is aesthetically titillating for oneself will not necessarily, when converted into paint or words, be much of a work of art. You have only to admire an artist shaking the life out of a subject or subtly possessing himself of its heart, and then watch an aesthete-would-be-artist fussily arranging his objects in the hope of getting a picture ready made—nothing left for him to do but transcribe—to recognize that here you have two utterly different attacks. One is creating, the other arranging. In his dealings with raw material, with the whole of life that is, the creator is little better than a beast of prey or a Pied-Piper without a grievance; the aesthete (when he is not aping the artist) no worse than a "vamp" or one of those naughty boys who overturn ant-heaps for the fun of watching the capers of their distracted inmates. Alike, or more or less alike, in their aims, since both seek aesthetic satisfaction, alike in their profound conviction that their ends justify any means, they are utterly unlike in their capacity of compelling means to ends. Wherefore there is not the slightest reason for expecting the perfect aesthete to be even a respectable artist. Where the two classes do come together is on quite another plane. Both are able to rise on the wings of art



RAFFAEL

DECORATION

*Alinari photo*  
Vatican





## ON THE FOREGOING

to a world above the world of normal experience. Both are free of the world of the spirit. To this high region they attain by means of art, as some do by thought, as many do by love. And that is why they take art seriously. From this world of the spirit they look down on the world of our sorrow. That is why the inhabitants of the latter find them quite intolerable.

The world of the spirit is good to live in, but not anyone who wishes can get there. One gets there only on wings. A good many people have paid it a visit—a short one—in youth, when they were passionately, beautifully and happily in love. Certainly there are wings of love for those who are capable of loving passionately, always provided they have the luck to fall in with someone capable of feeling a like emotion and willing to return it. To such wings the only drawback is, as most of those who have possessed them agree, that they wear out about as quickly as those of blue-bottles. Remain the wings of art, pure thought and, I make no doubt, religious ecstasy. Assuredly the rapt saint inhabits the world of the spirit, St. Francis must have been at home there; but frankly I am too ignorant of religious experience to say a single word about it. I am not much wiser about that exalted world in which dwell the philosophers. Wherefore I rely on the wings of art about which I hope I shall be allowed to know something, though what I have now to say will be violently contested. It is this: they sprout on those only who have been born with a peculiar sensibility, without which neither



## ENJOYING PICTURES

general education nor intensive culture will make them grow an inch.

One of the great charms of this world of the spirit is its climate. It is as though one had moved from Iceland to the West Indies. One's receptivity is kept constantly warm and open to impressions. Consequently all that exists there—much has been left behind—appears significant: one is in a condition to accept all that anything has to offer. The conversation and character of friends, the books we read, the flowers, the trees, the sea, the sky, all give—because we can take all they can give—more happiness than we, in the forsaken world, should have deemed them capable of giving. In the world of the spirit life is more intensely lived than elsewhere; and because experience seems more intense, what produces it seems more significant. I would liken it to the world of the convalescent; and, looking back, the life we have left to a prolonged cold in the head. Down there we did not realize the pleasure-giving possibilities of a hundred superficially undistinguished objects and events which, rather to our surprise, have come up with us. The irremediably boring has been shed; here we discover what happens and what is to be full of beauty and pathos or at any rate of pastime and prodigality. Life is much more amusing upstairs.

Seen from above, all that we left below begins to look uncommonly small. Not only the fussy activities of the herd, but our own terrestrial lives, our minor misfortunes,

## ON THE FOREGOING

vanities, vexations and ambitions appear, at such a distance, simply comic—

"Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature,  
Master of all or mistress of all, aplomb in the midst of irrational things,  
Imbued as they, passive, receptive, silent as they,  
Finding my occupation, poverty, notoriety, foibles, crimes, less important than I had thought. . . ."

Only a poet, an easy guest—perhaps without quite knowing where he was—in the world of the spirit, could have felt in that way. Anyhow, like Whitman, we too find that we cannot take our mundane selves quite seriously, and that still less can we take seriously the mundanities of anyone else. Only that which is moving or amusing in itself matters; and the affairs of common men, going about their business or pleasure, are in themselves neither one nor the other. You think this fanciful. The next time you are annoyed by a trifle try a visit to the National Gallery or a few poems by Marvell, and see whether the fishmonger having forgotten the oysters or the government or War Loan having fallen is not become by lunch matter for a witticism.

I cannot resist comparing the part played by art in the life of the aesthete with that played by particular works in the morning's happiness described in my first essay. Just as a particular work of art then gave the thrill which transported me to a world—the aesthetic mood—where the appreciative faculties became acute and sensibility lay wide



## ENJOYING PICTURES

open to impressions, so art in general carries the aesthete to that world of the spirit where he can live freely and gaily. It is not to be supposed that the aesthete or anyone else spends all his waking hours in that world. Even of art the wings tire. We all return to earth and waste a good part of our lives there. Only, anyone in the habit of visiting that other and pleasanter world, if he does not move on earth unguessed at, will move guessing, and guessing pretty shrewdly. He will find himself quite unable to take this world's values at this world's valuation. The glories of our state and blood, sceptre and crown, aye and scythe and spade too, he will consider with friendly amusement, or not at all: his heart will not beat in unison with the great heart of the season-ticket holders, nor yet with the even greater of the football fans.

And now I have to speak of a class which is generally, but in my opinion erroneously, accused of taking art seriously—the cultivated people. In so calling them I may be misleading. It may well be that some of those whom you would call 'cultivated' I should call 'aesthetes' and *vice-versa*. Anyhow, the distinction in my mind is clear, and I hope to make it clear to anyone who happens to take an interest in what is in my mind. Aesthetes, on my definition, are people for whom the world of art is outside common life and above it. Aesthetic experience or, to be as general as possible, attainment to the world of the spirit, is for them the end of existence. The world of our sorrow is a mere jumping-off place, necessary to them as their bodies,

## ON THE FOREGOING

from which they take wing and to which they return, but important only as a means. For people of culture, on the other hand, for people of culture as I use the term, wings, be they aesthetic or intellectual, are not wings at all. They are just good things amongst the other good things of life. They are what religion is to a respectable, active and church- or chapel-going citizen. For them art is an incident—an important incident if you like. It does not transport them beyond this life, but it gives this life a flavour. They ask of a painter that he shall enhance the value, the mundane value, of his subject. They do not ask him to dig below the surface in search of elements that can be carried into the world of the spirit, and they are considerably annoyed with him if he does. The cultivated gentleman commissions a portrait of Amabel, which is to be more Amabel than Amabel herself—Amabel at her best and a bit better. He is merely disgusted by those essential and eternal harmonies that Cézanne discovered in his long-suffering wife—at least he is at first. Later, when Cézanne or Raffael has taken his place in the hierarchy of culture, the man of culture must doff his cap. But he soon discovers a way of making the best of both worlds, or rather of eliminating one—the spiritual. He finds in Cézanne or Raffael what he wants to find. Thus the late Lord Morley assured us that even a reproduction of the Sistine Madonna made incessant child-bearing supportable to poor women in the East End of London, and therein found an excuse for Raffael (for my part, I should have thought a birth-



## ENJOYING PICTURES

control clinic would have been more to the purpose), while less public-spirited people remember not to forget *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* the next time they go on a water-picnic. But I do not want to be captious; there is no reason why people should not enjoy art as one of the good things of this life and value it for the fillip it gives to common experience. To be sure, their attitude precludes them from recognizing a genuine work of art at its first appearance, and from enjoying any great work of art for the qualities that make it great; but that is their loss chiefly. Nevertheless, even from an impure interest in art something is gained; and several French schoolboys, I am told, have been sent back to their Latin grammars and the verbs in *mu* by the plays of Racine, while literate maidens, deep in *Romeo and Juliet*, have before now made romance out of a squalid flirtation with the *locum tenens*. Only it is difficult to maintain that these people take art seriously.

For cultivated people, for my cultivated people that is to say, whom perhaps I had better call 'cultured', life is not conditioned by art, neither by art is it to be judged. On the contrary, art, more often than not, is tried by life. Is it like life? Is it useful to life? Is it uplifting or reassuring or subversive or reactionary? Those are the questions that people who take art seriously will never ask, because they are irrelevant. But how should those who have never escaped to the world of absolute values and know only this world's judge by anything else? For it is a question of values; and the values of Classes A and B (artists and

## ON THE FOREGOING

aesthetes) are different from those of Class C (the cultured). This difference leads to a further and most unfortunate misunderstanding. Habitual visitors to the other world are apt to be somewhat critical and contemptuous of this, and what is worse, can discover no essential difference in the variety of entertainments provided this side the barrier. Hence the complaint of Class C that Classes A and B are coarse and brutal in their relaxations and sweeping in their condemnation. They are said to drink and use foul language and tell dirty stories and consort with publicans and prostitutes. When some purveyor of refined treats, Sir Nigel Playfair for instance, emasculates the art of Shakespeare or Congreve by removing one or two scenes which all nice people admit to be nasty, these arrogant tourists, just back from a trip to eternity, make bold to call him not only hard but filthy names. What is more, they refuse to distinguish between a genteel travesty of *Polly*—"eighteenth century, you know, and by the poet Gay (if not Gray) and yet so up-to-date"—or *Cavalcade*, and *Chu-Chin-Chow* or *Charlie's Aunt*. Hammersmith is aghast at such indiscrimination. Hammersmith should try to understand that to anyone used to the pleasures of the world of absolute values—the pleasures of Shakespeare and Congreve are of that world naturally, and therein lies the offence of the urbane or rather suburban but degrading Sir Nigel—to anyone used, I say, to such pleasures, the pleasures of below-stairs are much of muchness. He cannot bother to distinguish the tattle of the servants'-hall from the rattle



## ENJOYING PICTURES

of the scullery. Wherefore, to such a one, obliged by sickness perhaps or lassitude, to spend an evening here below, it will not greatly signify whether that evening be lost at a bar or at *The Miracle*, in a brothel or reading one of the late Mr. Galsworthy's novels. On the whole, however, he finds the less genteel entertainments the more entertaining.

Lastly, can the craftsmen (Class D) be said to take art seriously? Here again it is important to make clear whom we are talking about when we speak of 'craftsmen'. All creators must be craftsmen to some extent: were they not, however much they might feel the itch, they could not render the reality they had seized or the conceptions they had elaborated. And I suppose there are a certain number of people, born with the temperament and catching-power of artists, who lack the necessary executive faculty. But they are very rare: presumably they join the aesthetes. A little craftsmanship goes a long way, and a man or woman born with the extraordinary gifts of an artist seldom fails, I imagine, to acquire an adequate technique. For one gifted child that fails to express itself from lack of technique there are probably a thousand whose native gift is ruined by masters who profess to teach the knack. A glance at the work of Miss Richardson's unbedevilled children, and another at the work of Academy or Slade students should suffice to prove that. To be sure it is a pet theory of mine that a certain number of people, born, not with the temperament or imagination of artists but with the artist's passionate itch for self-expression, lacking entirely the gift



(a) CASKET GERMAN XV<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY Victoria and Albert



(b) REVELATION SUIT CASE

Revelation Suit Case Co.,  
Piccadilly





## ON THE FOREGOING

of creation, turn to easier and more obvious modes of self-assertion. They express themselves by interfering with their fellows, and become those pests of society, busy-bodies, world-reshapers and universal tidiers-up—little Hitlers, Mrs. Webbs and Lady Astors. *Non ragioniam di lor.* That an artist-born often fails to acquire the necessary modicum of craft I do not believe. Why even that old duffer Cézanne, whose fingers seem all to have been thumbs, learnt to express himself, in so far as the tormenting subtleties that infested his mind were expressible; and I doubt very much whether a Velasquez or a Vermeer could have expressed Cézanne better. But of course there are great artists—Velasquez and Vermeer lie ready to hand as examples—who have been superlative craftsmen as well, and the perfection of their craft adds a subsidiary pleasure to our delight in their expression.

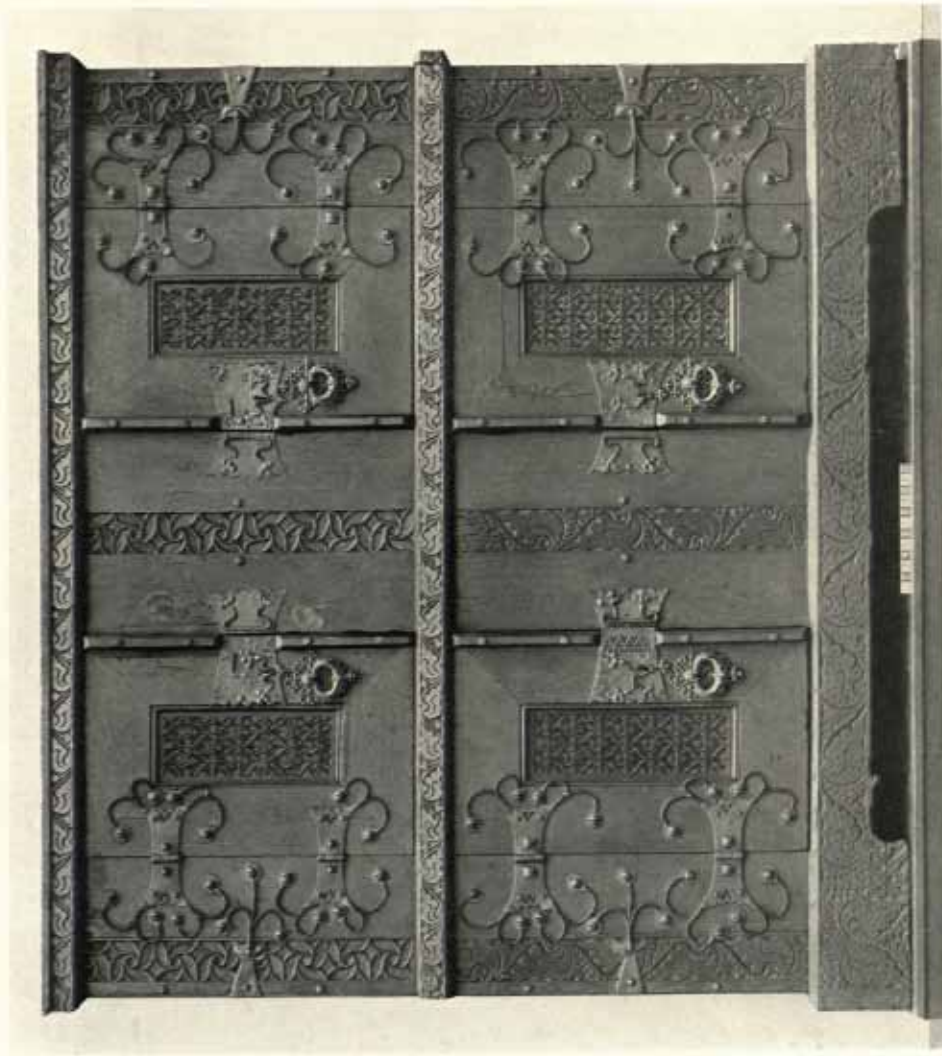
When we wax enthusiastic over the craftsmen of 'the good old days', the rustic cabinet-makers of the eighteenth century or the provincial silversmiths, what we are moved by really is not their craft but their art. The supreme triumphs of craftsmanship are to be looked for rather in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany or in nineteenth-century China. Those pulpits tortured into a thousand brittle forms out of a single log, those ivory balls niggled within balls, are miracles of craftsmanship devoid of art and as irritating as Milan Cathedral. Compared with these masterpieces English farmhouse furniture of the reign of George III or a service of Rouen faïence is the work of

## ENJOYING PICTURES

amateurs. And many a nasty, spiky object have I seen in exhibitions of contemporary handicraft which, as craft, could hold their own, and something more may be, with the productions of Chippendale and Hepplewhite. The ideal of craftsmanship is not aesthetic but mechanical, for the craftsman will be ever emulating the machine. The handsomest compliment you can pay him is to mistake his hand-made article for a machine-made. "And it is all made by hand, Madam": the commendation seems to suggest that the purchaser might reasonably have supposed that it was not, the glory lies in a human being having wrought as neatly and accurately as an engine. And glorious no doubt it is; a triumph of patience and skill but not of art. The works of contemporary craftsmen—furniture-makers, stone-cutters and smiths—are generally marvels of skill and patience, of erudition too, yet often they are less beautiful than the products of machinery. Who but prefers to an arty wardrobe hand-made by a virtuous homespun craftsman somewhere in the Cotswolds and left unstained too, an elegant Rolls or a shapely, satisfying locomotive? Who does not like the photographs in *The Times* better than the paintings in the Royal Academy? Why, nowadays, at art even, in the matter of proportion and

Plate 30<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 30A. This singularly repulsive little object belongs to the golden age of German craftsmanship, having been elaborated somewhere about 1420. Naturally it was acquired by Mr. Salting. As craft it could scarcely be better or as art worse. The carving, in complete relief, is a triumph of stubborn dexterity and perfectly inapt. Impossible to imagine ornament more excessive, more thoroughly out of proportion to the thing ornamented. But it was



CUPBOARD

GERMAN XV<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Victoria and Albert





## ON THE FOREGOING

relief, the machine very often beats the craftsman; and *Plate 31*<sup>1</sup> you will find on the market machine-made furniture, *Plate 32*<sup>1</sup> pottery and glass far superior to the stuff they sell in the craft-shops. In my mind's eye I have a steel sandwich-case belonging to a set of motor-car accessories,

in ornamentation that the master showed his craft, and what did proportion—art that is—signify by comparison? Look at the gigantic bejewelled lock. *Ga fait riche*—yes, and damned silly. 30B is an ordinary machine-made suitcase which The Revelation Suit-Case Company in Piccadilly was obliging enough to allow Mr. Cooper of Rose and Crown yard to photograph for me. Here is nothing startling, but here are decent proportion and discreet decoration. Observe that the only ornament is a strap pattern appropriately imposed by machinery in the place where a strap might be. No one will deny, I think, that this machine-made suitcase has more the air of a work of art than the hand-made casket. Another product of the golden age is this cabinet (*Plate 31*), made presumably in the Low Countries or Germany towards the end of the fifteenth century. I should not be surprised to learn that it was dear to the heart of many a modern craftsman: for it is a remarkable piece of work, and yet has the air of being extremely simple. Also it was made by hand; whereas this appetizing luncheon-box (*Plate 32*) was not. The making of a box or cupboard presents the artist with one of his most straightforward problems: a problem of proportion and relief. So far as shape goes, I have not much fault to find with either, nor much praise to bestow. It is in the proportion, disposition and quality of the decoration that the craftsman shows himself so very much not an artist. By his lack of art, by his deplorable taste, by an ill-considered exhibition of his craft, he has contrived to make of a perfectly respectable cupboard a tedious and slightly disgusting hump. The machine-made luncheon-box had to be filled with utensils, and I shall not deny that the necessity has produced a slight air of fussiness. This did not escape the notice of that admirable photographer Mr. Shaw-Wildman to whom Messrs. Fortnum and Mason gave permission to make a photograph; and he suggested taking out a few utensils, arranging them on the lid, and so making a composition. I would not hear of it. For that would have been to pit Mr. Shaw-Wildman's art against that of the craftsman; whereas what I wanted to

## ENJOYING PICTURES

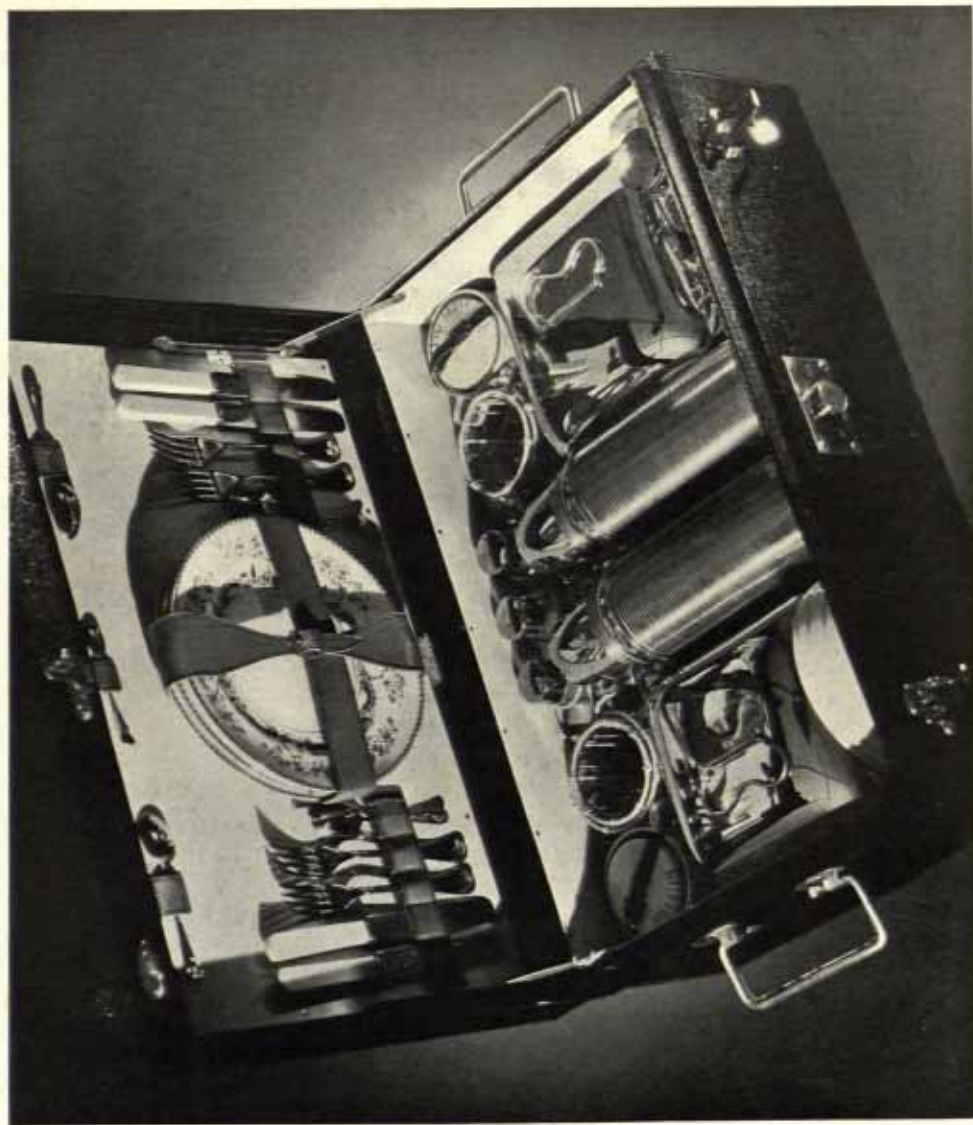
machine-made, beautifully though mechanically turned, not wrought, agreeably proportioned, aesthetically satisfying, and a silver Bath-Oliver box, hand-made, hammered into shape and out again, showing the marks, adorned with a hand-made enamel jujube, at which memory sickens.

The fact is, the craftsman, as such, is not an artist at all. He is possessed by the itch to make; but neither is he thrilled by his sense of reality nor, if he were, could he by imagination convert it to a conception. He is not passionate. Like the village carpenter or smith to whom, in his corduroys and half-timber cottage, he is fond of likening himself, he is a man with a job which he takes seriously. But taking one's job seriously is not taking art seriously. And the work of the craftsman, be he medieval stone-cutter or modern 'art-worker', is important to us precisely in so far as it is aesthetically significant. Craft leaves us cold. The artisan is interesting in so far as he is an artist and no further.

The craftsman, *qua* craftsman, deserves the respect due to any honest man who gets on with his job. He ranks with the conscientious clerk and the careful book-keeper. Like them he is probably a puritan at heart. His pleasures are

pit against the craftsman was a machine, or, to be exact, Messrs. Fortnum and Mason's engineer and engines directed by nothing but practical convenience. You can judge the contest for yourselves. The machine-made luncheon-box is on the whole satisfying, elegant and unpretentious. The craftsman's cupboard has been smothered under unnecessary, feeble and ill-placed ornament. It is rich in craft but poor in aesthetic quality; in a word, it is ugly.





LUNCHEON-BOX

Fortnum and Mason, Piccadilly





## ON THE FOREGOING

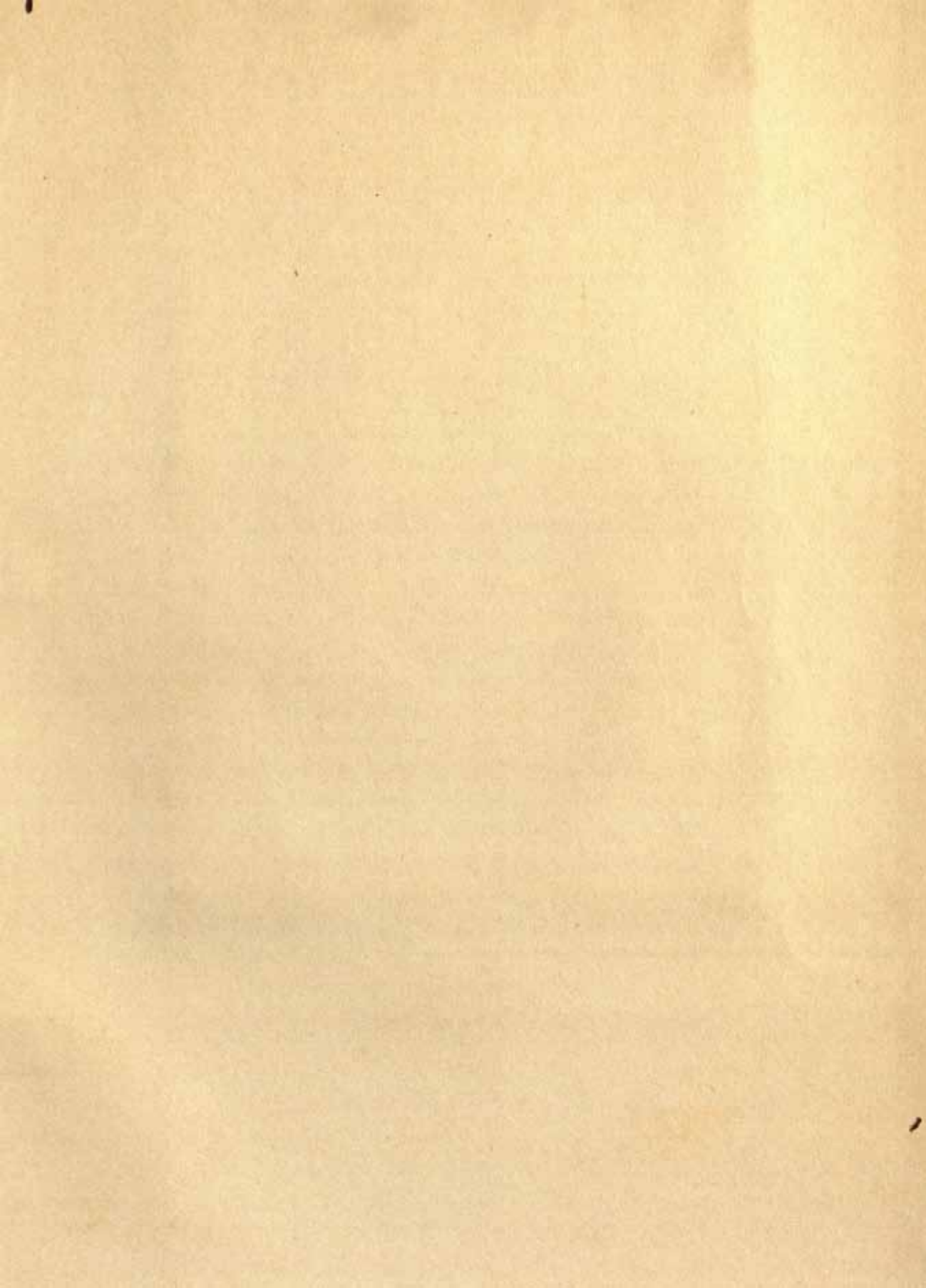
neither vicious nor rough; they are only elaborately simple. He comes to them not from the world of the spirit but from a good day's work. They are hearty not exasperated. No bar or brothel for him; but the ingle nook in a Trust house and half a pint of cider, and then away to the Morris or the Maypole. For him no expletive coarser than the downright 'damn' of old England, no hilarity more subversive than a sea-shanty.

Craft will not carry anyone into the world of spirit or near it. In the hand of an artist it may become an invaluable instrument—the pen in the hand of a poet; in the hand of one who is not it remains an instrument like another, a hoe, a hammer or a pair of scissors. No craftsman who is not an artist is likely to take art seriously, for were he an aesthete most probably his trade would bore him: there are exceptions no doubt. But far from testing life by art, the common craftsman judges art by life. More often than not he is a moralist whose talk is all of 'honesty', and I have heard with my own ears a wretched little builder of old-world villas and a chipper and chiseller of neo-gothic ornament presume to condemn St. Paul's on the ground that the dome was 'a fake'. It never occurred to either of them that it was beautiful. Far from looking down from the heights on the activities of the herd, the craftsman will seek to justify art by herdish standards, will jabber of its elevating effect on character, its dependence on the communal spirit, its place in the social, political and economic system of the country. No, never will he enjoy

## ENJOYING PICTURES

the unpopularity of people who take art seriously, nor their ecstasies. On the contrary, with his fancy-dress and financial integrity, he is just sufficiently unlike his fellows to gratify their taste for patronage and flatter their sense of worldly wisdom.

Those who take art seriously are those who find in art an escape from life. No wonder they take it seriously. By means of a thrill sensational almost in its impact—have you never jumped out of your chair and walked about the room on reading some particularly fine passage of poetry?—they are carried out of themselves, out of this world, into the world of the spirit. They make a religion of art, say the Philistines sarcastically. The Philistines are right, their taunt is well founded, if to live by and for ecstasies that are not of this hum-drum world is to be religious. Artists and aesthetes have a lively faith in another, a better, but not a future life; and their faith is firm because it is based on experience. Herein it seems to have the advantage of both supernatural religions and what is sometimes called the religion of Humanity. It depends neither on cooked history and tendentious metaphysics nor yet on unwarrantable assumptions concerning the value or perfectibility of common men. Supernatural religions are apt to be uncomfortable because they are at the mercy of history and logic. The religion of humanity is woefully and daily disproved by the facts. People who live by art have at least this much to depend upon: for them art does work miracles, and that is all they claim.





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