

# TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT



## SEPTEMBER READING

DONALD F. ROSE

### ART, AND THINGS LIKE THAT

**W**HEN artists fall out — as they usually do — ordinary men may come by their own. Artists seem to live perpetually amid the clash of positive opinions quite incomprehensible to those who do not move within their circles. Possibly the disposition to move too much in circles is exactly what is wrong with artists.

Two recent books on art are as far apart as the poles and manage to contradict each other roundly and flatly. *GONGORISM*, by Elisha K. Kane (University of North Carolina Press, \$3.50), undertakes to prove that all is vanity. *NEW DIMENSIONS*, by Paul T. Frankl (Payson & Clarke, \$6.00), asserts that vanity is everything, or practically everything. *Gongorism* uses the evidence of antiquity to discount modernity; *New Dimensions* asserts that unless art is close to the contemporary, it is not art.

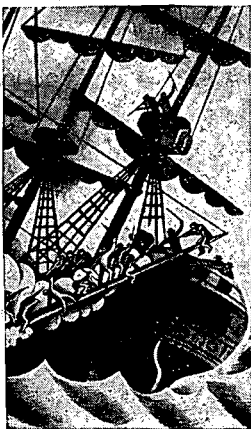
"Gongorism," it appears, is a term applied to the exuberance and extravagance of the golden age of Spain — the seventeenth century. As the Spanish poet, Gongora, bears the blame for his nation's indiscretions, so similar periods elsewhere are labeled by their leaders. Euphuism in England, Ronsardism in France, Marinism in Italy are made up of the same sort of thing. It is claimed by this book that Modernism, though it lacks to date a

particular prophet, totters on the very edge of a like calamity. So if you wish to blast a Modernist into speechless confusion, you may call him a Gongorist. He will not know what you mean, but he will know that you have no complimentary intention.

Gongorism was characterized by wild absurdities of idea and extravagance in style. It threw overboard all convention, restraint, and decency in favor of novelty, exuberance, and violence. It was full of energy, but had no sensible idea of what to do with it. Mr. Kane finds it a sure sign of decadence, and traces its vicious course in all the major arts of the period. For a final resounding wallop he asserts that modern art, music, architecture, literature, and decoration show all the symptoms of the same decadence.

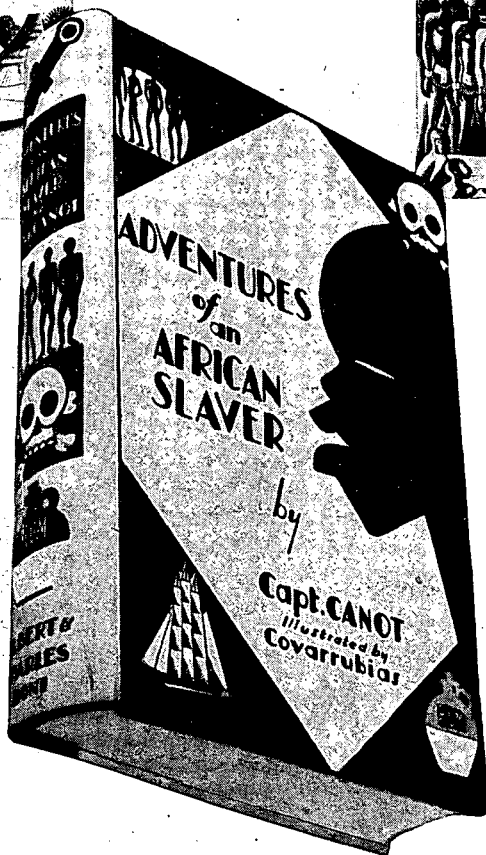
The book is rich in scholarship and does not lack courage. It is a bold man who will dismiss El Greco as a decadent, with the current market quotations on that gentleman fresh in mind. Yet Mr. Kane's explanation of the distortions which make El Greco difficult to the average eye is certainly more comprehensible than the vague ecstasies of most of his admirers. We can at least understand what he is talking about.

Mr. Kane does not care for the Woolworth Tower, which he calls "a sort of monstrous grain elevator with a steeple," and a typical example of "hermaphroditic



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