



Slate from "Indian Art of the United States."

Art of the Indian

INDIAN ART OF THE UNITED STATES. By Frederic H. Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 1941. 220 pp. 216 plates. \$3.50.

Reviewed by OLIVER LA FARGE

THIS book is issued in connection with the exhibition of Indian Art at the Museum of Modern Art, but it goes—by the deliberate intention of the authors—far beyond the limitations even of a descriptive and critical catalogue. Mr. d'Harnoncourt, as manager of the United States Indian Arts and Crafts Board, has been working for years to effect, not a sentimentalist's renaissance, but a practical, economically sound reëntry of the usable elements of Indian art into our general pattern. This effort lies back of his magnificent exhibit at the San Francisco Fair, and the New York exhibition. In it Mr. Douglas, a scientist of high standing, has been his close collaborator. It was to be expected then, that given the Museum's willingness to publish a book parallel to the exhibition, they would spread themselves.

The "catalogue" tradition confined them to the material actually shown in the Museum for their illustrations, it forced upon them the convention that the book, permanent in intention, must be close related, must indeed be usable as a handbook, to a display which is purely transitory. In effect this has meant that the illustrations fail to show the best material where the exhibition likewise fails—for instance, in Navajo silver—and are strongest where the exhibition is strongest—as in Northwest masks.

But despite this the authors have achieved a real success. Indian art has been the subject of so much sentimentalization and curio-exploitation as to render the subject nauseating to many people of sound, sophisticated esthetic sense. Douglas and d'Harnoncourt lift the subject out of all that.

Successfully, and with considerable daring, they have cast off not only the sentimental approach, but also the dead hand of anthropology. They have developed an artist's classification of their material which will continue to be used in the future, a classification based on the outstanding artistic technique of each area and period. They have presented the ever-changing, evolving, adaptable, protean art of the Indians sanely, reasonably, for what it is and no more. Because the presentation is not argued, but quietly factual, and because it is the work of men who combine the wide, detailed information of the scientist with the hard, practical experience of present day promotion, and both with integrity and sensitivity, the result is the best explanation of why Indian art is worth serious attention that has yet been offered.

It is also a readable, clear account of the artistic history and possibilities of a race. It is a layman's book, untechnical, and easy to read consecutively. It succeeds in taking masses of material and reducing them to a simple, logical order which enables any intelligent person to keep the whole well set in mind.

No work of this kind can be perfect. "Indian Art of the United States" suffers, as I have said above, from the catalogue tradition. It is too narrowly tied to the material actually shown, and to some extent overloaded by the requirement of discussing individual specimens where more general, broad discussion illuminated by the silent illustration would have been preferable. Also, humanly and understandably, the authors' predilection for certain periods and styles gives the book an occasional, mild unbalance. These are minor faults. The book will stand as the definitive popular work on the subject.

There are two hundred and sixteen plates in this book, of which sixteen are in full color. In view of its purpose, and that it is published by the Museum of Modern Art, one is surprised to find the color plates poor if not bad.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 365)

GEORGE GISSING
NEW GRUB STREET*

The struggle for existence among books is nowadays as severe as among men. . . . It's only by volume of shouting that the ear of the public is held. . . . Besides, . . . the growing flood of literature swamps everything but works of primary genius.

* (1891)

Mexicana

CANTINA. By Kim Schee. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 1941. 178 pp. \$1.75.

MEXICO: A New Spain with Old Friends. By J. B. Trend. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1941. 185 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HERBERT J. MULLER

LAST spring the American press suddenly became very much alarmed about Mexico. It was run by a lot of Communists, it was overrun by Nazi agents, and it was headed straight for a revolution. In fact, many Mexicans grew alarmed themselves. Nor were they reassured when prominent Americans suggested that we take over the country, to protect their democratic interests and our own; they could not see the difference between this proposal and what Germany had done to Denmark, or Russia to Finland. But most of the natives, blessed by illiteracy and a simple temperament, shrugged off all this talk of a revolution. Many had not even heard of it. I remember that when I brought up the subject, some were surprised and pleasurably excited, as by the news of a big fiesta or earthquake. About the war, however, I could not get them really interested. I would first have had to get over the idea of what and where Europe is.

It is of this unpolitical Mexico that Kim Schee writes, and writes very pleasantly. His "Cantina" is a collection of sketches or extended anecdotes about the simple natives, in love and in liquor. They are mostly in the *New Yorker* vein. There is the story, for instance, of Petra Ruiz: a woman so ill-favored in appearance and disposition that when she had a baby the pious but realistic townsfolk knew there could be only one explanation—it was an Immaculate Conception. There also enter some American visitors, notably the Tequila Twins: a pair of fat, middle-aged ladies with incurable troubles who set out to drink themselves to death but who, after a memorable six months, unfortunately effected a remarkable cure and returned to the States, again sober, fat, and middle-aged. (The typical tourist, incidentally, is apt to make the natives seem relatively complex, or even chaste.) Knowing the town of which Mr. Schee writes, I happen to know that his stories are in large part literally true. More important, they all could have happened, ought to have happened. And many of the illustrations, by Carl Critz, are also delightful.

J. B. Trend, however, does talk

about Mexican politics—as well as botany, language, archaeology, books, and many other matters. He is a professor of Spanish at Cambridge University; his “Mexico, a New Spain with Old Friends” is an account of a sabbatical holiday. The book contains a curious mixture of elementary and specialized information; some chapters read like a simple tourist’s diary, others are likely to interest only those who already know Mexico or have scholarly interests. Although it has little obvious charm, at least Mr. Trend is not resolved to be always charming; and although his observations are seldom original or penetrating, he is a good enough guide because he is always curious, sensible, honest, sympathetic. He is an unusually modest man of good will. His English readers can profit by the good will; their official and commercial representatives in Mexico have too seldom displayed any. American readers might profit specifically by his observations on the Cárdenas administration, and its hospitality to the Spanish refugees (the “old friends” of his title).

D. H. Lawrence remarked the “intense though often suppressed irritation,” finally the “bitter hopelessness that comes over people who know Mexico well.” These books give only an inkling of the good reasons for such irritation and hopelessness. But together they give a good idea of why the feeling need not be intense or bitter, and why Mexico remains so fascinating, and exciting a country.



Drawing by Carl Critz, from “Cantina.”

All Gaul Is Divided

LETTERS FROM OCCUPIED FRANCE. With a foreword by Elizabeth Morrow. New York: Greystone Press. 1941. 94 pp. \$1.

Reviewed by DOUGLAS SCHNEIDER

THAT the material of these letters came from the Occupied Zone cannot be doubted. Those who have lived there will recognize the misgivings of the peasant, off to “inscribe” his pig, the organized disorder of the Reichswehr passport bureau, the Feld-Polizei’s “red phonograph discs at the end of short handles” for signalling to traffic.

The author’s command of French is no less certain. Few American adapters could have invented the Gallic metaphor for the glass of wine given to the Garde Champêtre: “something to dampen his tonsils.” French rhythm underlies many an apparently well balanced English sentence. The letters, though not dated, follow a chronological order, judging from allusions to the first invaders, Indian Summer, Christmas trees. This arrangement may justify the sub-title. But the reader will not be misled: if these are letters they are, very decidedly, to be considered among those written for publication. Like the marquise writing to her daughter, Madame de Grignan, the author of this collection re-

alized that more than one reader would have access to this correspondence.

The reactions of the citizens are studied fairly, their hardships, material and moral, set forth with sympathy. Minor discrepancies between the writer’s experience and what most of us saw (women and commercial travellers coming in only eighteen hours after the troops, for instance) do not alter the fact that these ninety-five pages give a clearer picture of life and thought in France than do many more ambitious books. Not the least touching note is the feeling, be it subtly or naively conveyed, that the author, while describing the utter bewilderment of the French, has not wholly succeeded in clearing his own mind from that bewilderment.

Those whose love for France has never weakened, for whom the Café du Dôme and the Bar du Ritz are not all Gaul should read this book. They will derive from it much knowledge if little joy, and bitter sweet memories. “The wind was etching curlicues upon the surface of the Seine and the bells of Sainte Clotilde were ringing for nine o’clock mass,” says the author. And you may then, if you loved Paris, think of Verlaine and of the Chanson d’Automne:

.....quand
Sonne l’heure,
Je me souviens
Des jours anciens
Et je pleure.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

LITERATURE’S UNHAPPY LOVERS

The course of true love never did run smooth, and sometimes it has taken some terrific jolts. From the descriptions of their misfortunes given below can you recognize the unfortunate victims? Allow 5 points if you can give their names, and another 5 if you can also recall the story in which they appeared and its author. A score of 60 is par, 70 is good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 20.

1. When her lover was murdered and buried in the forest, this heroine dug him up, planted his head in a pot basil, and watered it with her tears.
2. Separated when they were compelled to evacuate their home land, these betrothed lovers met many years later as he was dying of the plague.
3. This super-romantic but homely lover courted the woman he loved and won her—for another, a handsome but stupid soldier.
4. Frightened away from their trysting place by a lion, she fled, leaving a blood-smeared veil; her lover, finding it, stabbed himself.
5. Though her nocturnal lover warned her never to try to get a look at him, curiosity prevailed; she lit a lamp when he was asleep, spilled a drop of hot oil on him, and the honeymoon was over.
6. When she separated from her lover and hastened ahead to her home in a haunted forest in order to prepare for her wedding, she was captured and burned to death by superstitious South American savages.
7. The twentieth time that he proposed to her she accepted him, but his mother talked her out of it and they were separated for many years.
8. She was happy with the lover who had been cast ashore on the island where she lived, until her father returned and banished the boy friend.
9. The vast difference in their social rank prevented him from proposing to the farmer girl who gave him a cup of water one day.
10. This couple never got together, for she lived in a drop of water under a microscope, while he looked on from the other end of it.