

THE FINE ARTS

SLIGHTED FIELDS AND FAMILIAR GROUND

FOR several years now art books have been appearing in profusion, a few of them excellent, many poor, the majority simply indifferent. Whatever their quality, their number is an encouraging sign that art is still on the upswing in America, that it begins to crowd hard our traditional favorites, music and literature. The pity is that publishers here and abroad practise such duplication of subject, concentrating on certain artists and fields, neglecting others. If, for example, one book on Renoir appears, more are sure to follow. To give a specific case in point, Claude Roger-Marx's very good monograph on the late French master Edouard Vuillard arrived from France last year; in the same shipment came a rather poor one by Jacques Salomon.

The cases can be repeated endlessly. Perhaps that is why some of the recent art books seem especially valuable in that they deal with subjects on which little first-rate material is available. Otto Benesch's "The Art of the Renaissance in Northern Europe" (Harvard University Press) has a wealth of illuminating data on the intellectual and emotional currents which produced Dürer, Grünevald, Altdorfer, Cranach, Bruegel, the Fontainebleau Mannerists, and other important sixteenth-century painters in the North. Dr. Benesch's book tells us so much that it makes us realize how little has been published in English on this vital subject. Another neglected aspect of sixteenth-century art is treated in Giuliano Briganti's "Il Manierismo e Pellegrino Tibaldi" (Cosmopolita, Rome), now available in our larger bookshops. The book deals with Italian Mannerism as the separate style it is now widely admitted to be, though until recently and in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary many of our scholars dismissed the movement as merely a deathbed convulsion of the Renaissance. I read Italian with such difficulty that I have made little headway with the text, but many of the illustrations—those of works by Beccafumi and Tibaldi, among others—are an exciting revelation.

Other recent art books are noteworthy, not because they explore slighted fields, but because they re-evaluate familiar ground. A truly remarkable example is John Summer-

son's "Georgian London" (Scribners'), one of the major events in modern architectural criticism. Many Americans who have been to London cherish a dream of its eighteenth-century grace as having evolved from a society endowed with superlative taste. So, in a sense, it did. But Mr. Summer-son's book makes clear that Georgian London was produced largely by hard-boiled speculators, sometimes with brilliant results, yet often with sad waste of architectural opportunity. He does not belabor his subject, he is not interested in the petulant esthetic game of locating moles on the Venus de Milo, but his scholarly reappraisal of eighteenth-century London provides an irrefutable argument in favor of city planning.

The late nineteenth century in France continues to be a favorite subject for publishers and hence for writers, and Hyperion Press has lately added "Van Gogh" and "The Etchings of the French Impressionists" to their series in this field. The former book has a lucid text by Edward Alden Jewell and inferior plates. The color plates in the latter volume, and some of the black-and-whites as well, can only be described as appalling. The reproduction of Cézanne's "The Bathers," for instance, is a travesty of that master's style, and in general very great graphic art struggles against grayness and bad register. It is a relief to turn from such slapdash bookmaking to John Rewald's "History of Impressionism" (Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Simon & Schuster). Mr. Rewald's book supplies an impressive answer to those who had assumed there was not much left to say about Impressionism: obviously none of us knew the half of it. The book has been criticized as excessively factual, but that, I think, is its virtue. Stylistic analyses of Impressionism have continually been based on errors of chronology which Mr. Rewald has now corrected. His



book should henceforth be used by students as a check against R. H. Wilenski's "Modern French Painters," an entrenched textbook because of its brilliant virtues, but abounding in factual mistakes.

The American nineteenth-century field is slowly being re-examined. The New York State Museum at Albany has devoted its bulletin No. 339 to a study of the life and works of Edward Lamson Henry by Elizabeth McCausland. The text and captions have been carefully prepared, and are illustrated by numerous reproductions which are small but adequate; included are fascinating photographs relating to Henry and his period. Miss McCausland has also published this year a much-needed study of one of our finest landscapists, George Inness. And the Brooklyn Museum has issued a monograph on the American Impressionist Theodore Robinson, with an excellent text by John I. H. Baur—the whole a model of painstaking research, clarity, and reproduction.

As to the modern Americans, Doubleday & Co. has recently printed a large volume, "Painting in the U.S.A.," with a host of quite good plates, many in color, and a rambling but refreshingly non-dogmatic text by Alan D. Gruskin. The paintings illustrated are mostly middle-of-the-road "subject" pictures. I frankly find a great number of them tedious and already stale, but there is nothing wrong with this genre if the artists' talents are strong, as some of the plates testify. Moreover, it is to Mr. Gruskin's credit that he has tried to give a sense of modern American art's variety, instead of writing a platform for his favorites. A rather exceptional publication, it seems to me, is the monograph on Philip Evergood issued by the A.C.A. Gallery and distributed by Simon & Schuster. Evergood is one of our most original artists, occasionally one of our most inspired, and this book is a welcome and handsome document on his career; it contains Evergood's own clear statement of his beliefs and a good essay on his humanism by Oliver Larkin. The Dryden Press has printed a monograph on the now celebrated American primitive Grandma Moses, edited by Otto Kallir and including one of those blue-jean forewords by Louis Bromfield. I cannot respond to the excitement of those who find in Grandma Moses another Rousseau or John Kane, but she is certainly a fresh and amiable painter, and her modest quality comes through both in the reproductions and her writing.

In praising Grandma Moses's pictures, Mr. Bromfield notes that they are far from "the assembly line abstractions of the later Picasso." To

understand the full banality of this statement, you need only look at Sidney and Harriet Janis's "Picasso: The Recent Years" (Doubleday & Co.), a book whose plates reveal the extraordinary creative power of an artist who, almost alone among modern painters, has gone on for fifty years with unrelenting vigor. The full half decade of his great career is treated in Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s "Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art" (Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Simon & Schuster). This is by all odds the most distinguished monograph yet published here or abroad on a twentieth-century artist. The same publishers have also produced a fine book on Marc Chagall, with an eminently readable and informative text by James Johnson Sweeney.

There have been several omnibus publications, of which I have space to mention only two: "Masterpieces of Painting from the National Gallery," superbly edited by Huntington Cairns and John Walker, distributed by Random House. This, surely, is one of the outstanding art books of recent years; its eighty-five color plates are good; its commentaries by famous writers of all periods have been chosen with rare inspiration and cogency. The "Art News Annual for 1946-47" maintains that publication's honest standards; this year its high spots are articles on the Gardner Collection in Boston, the new vision in abstract photography, and master drawings of today.

Well, art is long indeed, and every so often someone has to take it bravely in hand, cry "bottoms up!", and down it at one gulp. Aline B. Louchheim has done this in "5,000 Years of Art" (Howell, Soskin), and done it well; her text is lively, to the point, and serious. Included are good plates and almanacs of the various periods. The latter might have been more carefully proofread, since every word counts for so much, but the facts are there, and when they are not salient they are provocative. Personally, I was especially pleased to read the entry for 1931: "Rockefeller Center in New York begun. Alexander Calder's first mobiles." That's the way to boil these things down—the creative mechanic, alone with his pliers, as important as the massive engineering boast.

Five thousand years! We build so slowly. And then, in a few years of war, much of the magic accumulation is destroyed. Just how much we lost between 1939 and 1945 may be seen in "Lost Treasures of Europe: A Pictorial Record" (Pantheon Books). Read it and weep, but read it, please.

JAMES THRALL SOBY.

[Knopf has the novels for 1947]

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Dickens and Mr. Spring



DUNKERLEY'S. By Howard Spring.
New York: Harper & Bros. 1947.
246 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

FEW critics have found the au-
thor of "My Son, My Son," that
highly successful novel of a few
years ago, a completely satisfactory
writer. That he is a born storyteller,
that his prose flows along with the
greatest of ease, that he has a de-
corative descriptive faculty is taken
for granted, but at the same time he
lacks that quality of magnificence and
greatness that the Victorian and Ed-
wardian period in which his novels
dwell provided so abundantly. He
writes, it has been said, beautifully
about nothing that vitally matters.

Self-educated, coming from a poor
Welsh family, he must have read and
reread Dickens in his youth. He is
fascinated with the Dickensian slums
of great cities, that monstrous swamp
of poverty, misery, and crime whose
tentacles in Victorian novels reached
into the stately homes of the upper
classes and destroyed whatever they
touched.

Mr. Spring's latest novel is a per-
fect example of that favorite Victorian
theme. It is a continuation of an
earlier novel, "Hard Facts," in which
a Manchester printer, Daniel Dunker-
ley, rose to success and wealth by
creating a popular penny journal with
that title. Its editor, Alec Dillworth,
and his sister, Elsie, have risen from
the foul slums of Manchester. In
"Dunkerley's," Mr. Spring's novel,
Alec has become a part of Daniel's,
now Sir Daniel's, publishing empire.
They are safe, as in many of Dick-
ens's novels, as long as they keep away
from the foul streets and alleys of
their childhood. At the end, when
Elsie is happily married, and Alec is
engaged to one of *Dunkerley's* most
successful women novelists, their dis-
graceful origin takes its revenge. Near
the pest-hole in which they had once
lived Elsie meets her corrupt and
drunken father. His attempt to black-
mail her fails since she has confessed
to her husband, Sir Daniel's right-
hand man, that her father had forced

her into prostitution when she was
a child. Alec becomes involved and
sentimentally tries to aid the old
broken-toothed monster. In the best
Victorian manner both of them fall
over a cliff and are killed.

That this melodramatic plot is some-
how made reasonable to modern read-
ers is due to the author's narrative
gifts and to his entertaining descrip-
tion of the early development of a
British publishing trust. The novel is
at times drenched with the kind of
sentimentality that is popular in any
age.

There are interludes of extraordi-
nary beauty as when Alec, tired of the
commercial editing *Dunkerley's*
demands, runs away for a week and dis-
covers, through the ministrations of
a good-hearted country woman, some
of the earthy facts of life, including
the pleasures of sex. A Freudian ap-
proach to most of the characters might
have provided a writer who was will-
ing to look beneath the surface with
the materials for a modern psychologi-
cal novel. Some reasonable interpreta-
tions of the emotional relationship be-
tween Alec and his sister would have
explained, for example, why he had
remained chaste for so long. Mr.
Spring is willing to leave it a mys-
tery and to blame it on the statement
that Elsie's promising career as a
violinist had been wrecked by an in-
jury to her hand for which he was
responsible. Dickens surrounded un-
comfortable ideas with a fog of ro-
mantic secretiveness and so does Mr.
Spring.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Coleridge: "The Ancient Mar-
iner." 2. Poe: "The Bells." 3. Lind-
say: "The Congo." 4. Kipling: "Boots."
5. Tennyson: "Break, Break, Break."
6. Longfellow: "Wreck of the Hesper-
us." 7. Shakespeare: "Under the
Greenwood Tree." 8. Moore: "A Visit
from St. Nicholas." 9. Tennyson: "The
Splendour Falls." 10. Herrick: "Corin-
na's Going A-Maying." 11. William
Stevenson (or John Still): "Back
and Side Go Bare." 12. Tennyson:
"The Charge of the Light Brigade."
13. Dryden: "Alexander's Feast." 14.
Whitman: "O Captain! My Captain!"
15. Fitzgerald: "The Rubaiyat." 16.
Noyes: "The Barrel Organ." 17. Dan
Emmet: "Dixie." 18. Shakespeare:
"King Lear." 19. Keats: "Ode on a
Grecian Urn." 20. Burns: "O Wert
Thou in the Cauld Blast." 21. Miller:
"Columbus." 22. Hood: "The Song of
the Shirt." 23. Byron: "The Isles of
Greece." 24. George Root: "Tramp,
Tramp, Tramp!" 25. Wordsworth:
his novels, as long as they kept away
"To a Skylark."