

THE FINE ARTS

THE WORTH WHILE AND THE EXTRAVAGANT

THE ENGLISH do like to write about their painters, and there is a vast literature dealing with the entire careers of their important masters, with the eccentricities of their minor ones, above all with the least breath and longest sigh of the leading Pre-Raphaelites. But where is the up-to-date, illustrated monograph on Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-97), that extraordinary man whose subject was light—the light of Vesuvius or of factories at night, of lamp-lit parlors wherein the Age of Reason's amateur scientists demonstrate marvelous air pumps and astronomical gauges to their families and friends? Where is the big new book on George Stubbs (1724-1806), a great anatomist, of course, but also a delectable painter? Where is the full-length modern work on James Ward (1769-1859), on John Martin (1789-1854)? Where are the adequate studies of Alexander Cozens, P. J. de Louthembourg, the Rev. Matthew Peters, Henry Walton, Francis Danby, Edward Calvert, Augustus Egg, James Smetham, William Dyce, Richard Dadd, and many others?

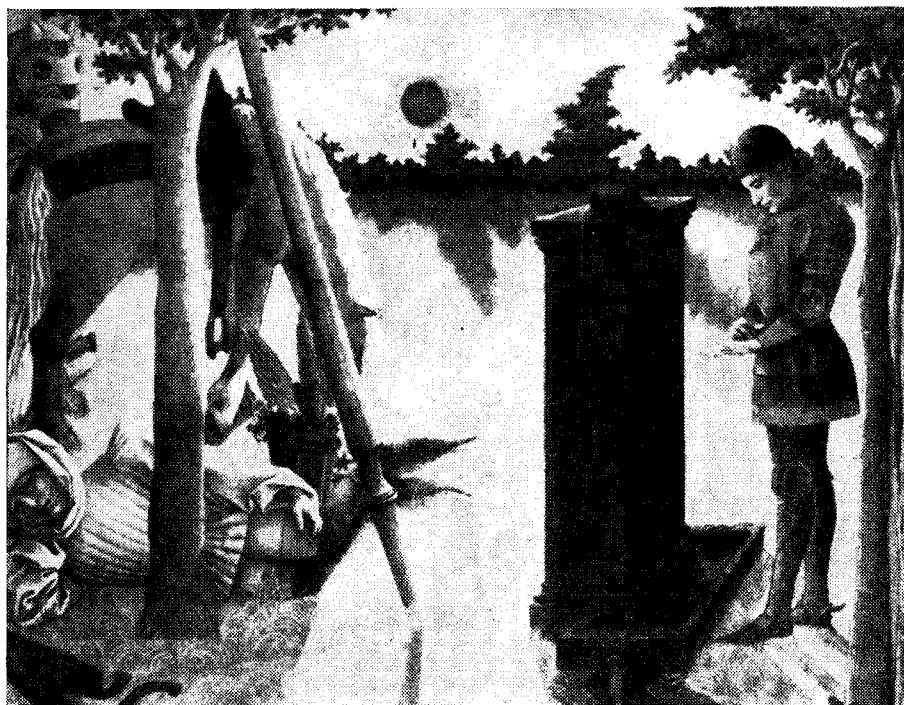
Perhaps we must blame the war for England's recent neglect of its minor masters, for ten-odd years ago Sach-

everell Sitwell brought a number of them into sharper focus in "Narrative Pictures" and "Conversation Pieces," while today a few younger British critics venture clear of the engulfing shadows cast by Hogarth, Blake, Turner, Constable, and the Grand Manner portraitists. Geoffrey Grigson's long-awaited monograph on Samuel Palmer is now available (London, Paul Kegan, \$10 here). Beautifully illustrated, the book deals primarily with Palmer's early years (1827-34) when, at Shoreham in Kent, he was the leader of a group of visionary artists known as "The Ancients"—one of the most interesting of the many brotherhoods which served as central heating for nineteenth-century painters, allaying the drafts of public indifference or contempt. Palmer is a main foundation stone of the current revival of romantic naturalism in English painting. His significance for present-day British artists is twofold. On the one hand, his lichen texture and faith in emotional "excess" have meant much to living British painters; in another, more formal sense, the exceptional plasticity of his forms, so deft in placing and in balance of clump against void, has endeared him to relatively abstract artists like Gra-

ham Sutherland and Henry Moore. In short, Palmer is to today's English art what Cézanne once was both to expressionism and cubism in France.

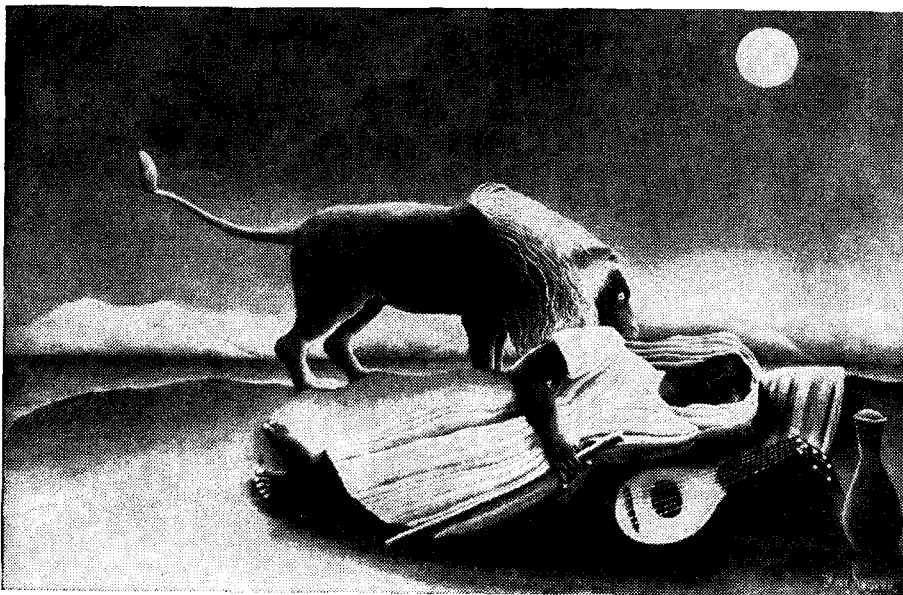
Mr. Grigson has also now published "The Harp of Aeolus" (London, Routledge, \$4.50 here), a provocative little volume of essays containing new material on some at least of the neglected British painters mentioned above. Like most English art critics, Mr. Grigson is as much interested in poetry as in painting, and this may account in part for a certain nimbleness and vividness of metaphor in his and other British writing on painting, making some American critical studies seem over-terse, in the legendary manner of our Indian's "Ugh!" and "How!" But another new art book from London, though it lacks the expected literary grace, is none the less a useful and informative work. This is Francis D. Klingender's "Art and the Industrial Revolution" (London, Noel Carrington, \$5.50 here). Some of the book is concerned with the technical illustration of machinery. For me its most fascinating sections deal with the way in which industrial subject matter entered the vocabulary of English romanticism and became part of the extravagant eighteenth-century diction of the "sublime." In no other country, I think, did blast furnaces, mines, factories, and machines compete so early with nature for the romantic artist's attention. Mr. Klingender's book should give pause to those enthusiastic critics who claim that the American realists of the 1920's were the first to applaud the beauties of industrial subjects. And it makes us understand why France's great romantic, Théodore Géricault, visiting London in 1820, should have abandoned occasionally the heroic charges of his earlier career for the dray horses and wagons of the English coal fields. The machine esthetic was in the British air, whereas France still preferred a humanistic dramaturgy.

The romantic field as a whole is coming back into favor in art, and a valuable addition to its source material is Paul Wescher's "Die Romantik in Schweizer Malerei" (Switzerland, Huber & Co., \$6.50 here). The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not produce in Switzerland a Manuel Deutsch, an Urs Graf or a Paul Klee, but this well-printed book brings to light a number of interesting works by artists whose names we are likely to know better as time goes on. The book ends with the mid-nineteenth century, as do nearly all studies of European romantic art, and while this chronological limit is perfectly valid in terms of high movement, it tends to underplay



—National Library, Vienna.

"Coeur and Désir at the Magic Well" by the Master of Duke René of Anjou—"unbelievably close in motif to a celebrated modern painting . . ."



"Sleeping Gypsy" by Henri Rousseau—"the postures of the sleeping figures are comparable, the arrangement of inanimate objects roughly similar."

—Museum of Modern Art.

the continuing effect of romanticism on artists who worked later in the century. Charles Chassé's "Le Mouvement Symboliste dans l'Art du XIXe Siècle" (Paris, Flourey, \$3.00 here) makes clear that the romantic strain was strong in painters whose careers began after the death of Delacroix in 1863—Odilon Redon, Carrière, Maurice Denis, even Gauguin. The symbolist movement in art is often lost to view amid the pinnacles of post-impressionism and cubism, and it seems a pity that it could not have been explored more exhaustively in M. Chassé's book. Much space is given to Maurice Denis, admittedly a leading theorist of the 1890's but an artist of pallid attainment, whereas little is said about the effect of symbolism on Bonnard and Vuillard, whose art is more impressive today than ever.

Two picture books have arrived from Europe, published by the Marion Press and distributed here by the Continental Book Center. These are "Sisley in the Musée du Louvre" (\$8.75) and "Van Eyck's 'The Holy Lamb'" (\$16.50). Between them, I think, they exemplify what can be good or bad about books of this sort, that is, large books with numerous color plates and accessory texts. Perhaps I am prejudiced in the matter, since I like art-historical books to work with rather than to fondle on the bibliophilic knee, but it seems to me that volumes like the "Sisley" are fairly useless and too expensive for what they give.

Van Eyck's "Holy Lamb" is another matter. This polyptych is so great and complex a work that it needs to be studied closely, over and over again, and the illustrations of its details in the Marion Press monograph—particularly those in black and white—are

altogether rewarding. Here, I think, is the answer to the picture-book problem. If such a book reveals something new about art, through either variety or concentration of illustration, it appears worth while; if it is merely a de luxe record of the familiar, it seems extravagant.

In terms of modern esteem, Van Eyck's closest fifteenth-century counterpart in France is Jean Fouquet, and there has now appeared in English Paul Wescher's "Jean Fouquet and His Time" (Switzerland, Pleiades Books, \$10.80 here). I do not know enough about Fouquet or his French contemporaries to vouch for the book's final accuracy, but it seems carefully done, and much of its excitement lies in the discussion and illustration of the mid-fifteenth-century illuminators of manuscripts, especially the Master of Duke René of Anjou. Among the latter's works reproduced is "Coeur and Désir at the Magic Well," the left section of which is unbelievably close in motif to a celebrated modern painting—the Douanier Rousseau's "Sleeping Gypsy." The postures of the sleeping figures in their pleated coats are comparable, the arrangement of inanimate objects roughly similar. Even the manes of the animals—a horse in one, a lion in the other—are alike, and in both images a low sun (Master of René) or moon (Rousseau) dominates the sky. Since the manuscript containing the Master of Duke René's illustrations has long been in Vienna, it is doubtful whether Rousseau ever saw it. Yet what is more stirring than any question of direct interrelation, is the fact that so lyric and French a vision should have been painted by artists who lived four hundred years apart. Art is long. It is also constant.

JAMES THRALL SOBY.



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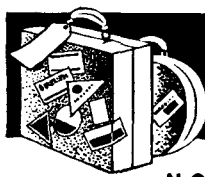
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BOOKED *for* TRAVEL

NOTES FOR A FRENCH POSTCARD

FRIEND of ours who used to live in France flew over to Paris a couple of weeks ago on his first visit since the war. He couldn't resist searching out the old street where he used to live. The house was there, all right, and so was his old concierge, who broke into tears, kissed him on both cheeks, and handed him three letters that had been waiting the better part of the war.

After a few wretched years of rehabilitation, France seems to be picking up where it left off in 1939. Already the Americans are back, civilian Americans. You see them comparing notes in the hotel lobbies, buying the *Paris Herald* at the kiosks, and carrying it about town like a badge of nationality. You hear them charging across the language barrier with their Berlitz French, announcing to the world how passionate they are when they mean how warm. A new generation of students has holed up in the garrets, and although this time they are studying on the GI Bill of Rights, they still gather on the *bull-mish*, still grow beards, still struggle to make ends meet. The Café de la Paix serves American breakfasts after ten a.m., a chain of pseudo-Americanized restaurants known as the Pam-Pam make a specialty out of Le Chicken Hash, and

a new place named Le Hamburger on the rue d'Antin gets more Yanks than a Legion convention. The Legion, incidentally, has a rather active Paris chapter, and maintains a whole building where it sells forty-five-franc cognac, operates a soda fountain, and recruits new members from the American colony. An enterprising legionnaire a few months ago was parlaying at least two of the activities. "Remember," he reminded candidates, "in case of war with Russia, this will be the only place in town where you can get an ice-cream soda."

On the elegant side, Paris has a new night club called Le Drap d'Or, which serves champagne in silver goblets and hires a twenty-four-piece string orchestra to play at the tables. Monseigneur has fresh flowers, violins, and expensive wine, and Maxime's is glittering like the old days. You can trap the bearded thinker at places like Tabou, Caveau des Oubliettes, and La Rose Rouge, a low and smoky den usually so crowded the entertainers rush on stage from the washroom. Most clubs are formal Friday nights. If you're looking for the old-time Parisian hotel service, check in at the George V, probably the lushest spot in Paris and always full of movie stars and Americans.

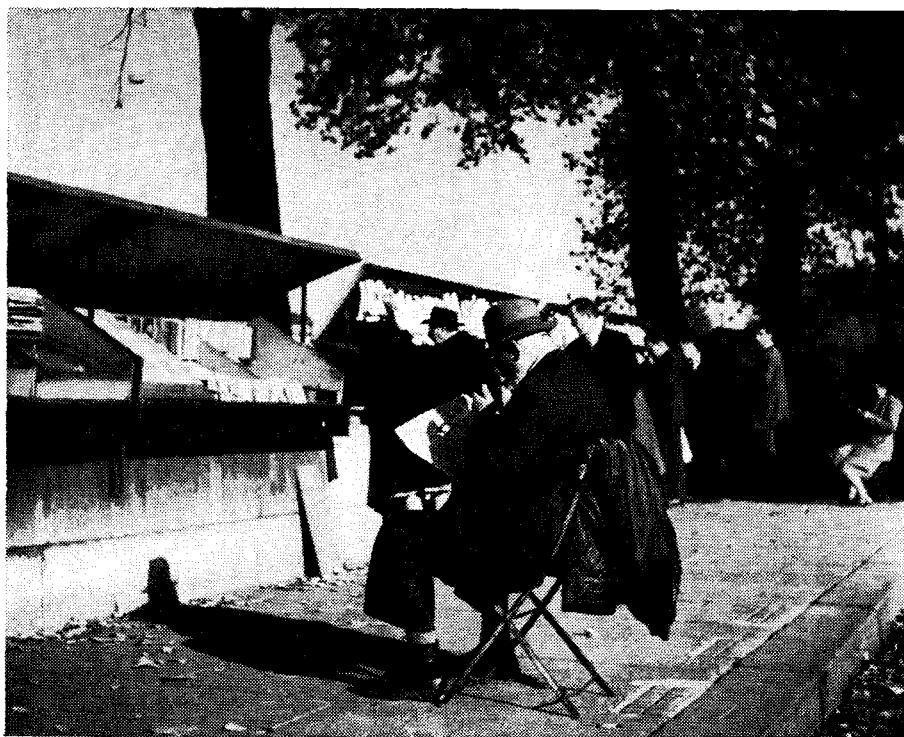
With the franc hovering around 300 to the dollar at the free rate, the luxury life is not as expensive as it sounds. None the less things in the provinces are cheaper and a good deal less frilly. Regular tours run out of Paris to the landing beaches in Normandy and, although most of the rubble in the towns has been cleaned up, the metal guts spewed from wounded assault ships still lie in the sand, and the stolid Normans haven't quite forgotten *day-day*. Brittany fared much better and the province lives unchanged, like an island which was cut away from civilization and set adrift in time. Bretons are descended from the Celts, speak a Celtic tongue, and suffer the melancholia of a people who live by the sea. They are generally as full of superstition as a dream book, talk of death in hushed allegorical terms, and the women affect starched white headgear which often stand a foot high.

Down in the Basque country, around Biarritz, the Basque men never wear ties, bury their dead under keyhole-shaped tombstones, burn rope candles in church, hang cheese from the ceiling to dry, and use solid wheels on their carts. In Corsica, now an hour from the flossy Riviera via Air France, the farmers wear dark corduroy coats, black felt hats, striped shirts, and red flannel cummerbunds three yards long. They smoke Corsican briar pipes half hidden in the brush of a huge beard, ride donkeys all over the place, and insist on wearing their overcoats like a cape. The Alsations, on the other hand, after living with the Germans for a number of years, have inherited the whimsical oompah that goes with beer bellies and German bands. The language is a hopeless hodge-podge of German and French spoken at an incredible clip with an off-beat, hot-potato quality.

No matter where you go in France you'll find Frenchmen still lift their hats clean off their heads as a greeting, bow at the slightest recognition, shake hands at the drop of a pinky with everyone in sight. As André Maurois has recently explained, the French are also mature about sex. On the boulevards, in the cafes, under a tree in the Bois de Boulogne, a French lad and a French girl in love have eyes only for each other. You may think it's a disgusting display, a fortunate exhibition, or ain't-France-romantic. Locally they think it's lovely, and I must say that after a while the approbation is catching.

HORACE SUTTON.

The text and pictures by Horace Sutton in this issue are largely from his forthcoming guidebook "*Footloose in France*," scheduled for late-summer publication by Rinehart.



—Photographs by Horace Sutton.

The bookstalls— "... as Maurois explained, the French are mature about sex ... locally they think it's lovely ... and the approbation is catching. ..."