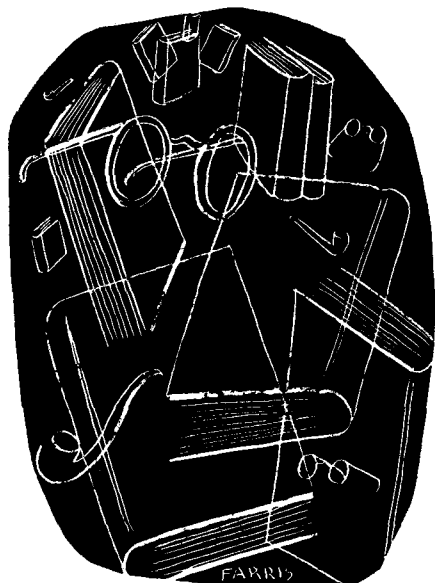


property of a . . . family who held it as liegemen of the Patriarch of Aquileja. Later the Tybeins freed themselves from . . . the patriarch and owed allegiance to the Babenberg Dukes of Austria . . . In the thirteenth century the family died out; the lordship of Duino fell to the Wallsees, and when this family became extinguished, to the House of Austria . . . According to tradition, Dante had stayed [at Duino] as an exile . . . Count Thurn-Valsassina, an ancestor of the princess on her mother's side, bought Duino from Emperor Leopold I, and it had been in the possession of her family for almost 300 years.

In these unique surroundings, immortalized through Rilke's "Duino Elegies," and enjoying as distinguished a company as could be gathered, the poet and his newly won great friend spent the last normal summer allotted to their world. For it was 1914.

From the date of Rilke's first letter to his admirer—"Paris, 26 January 1914"—the reader of this touching memoir undergoes the same feeling we experience when, in Noel Coward's "Cavalcade," the young couple aboard the *Titanic*, stepping back from the railing, uncover to the audience the name of the ship, lettered on the lifebuoy. The descriptions of Rilke's life in this pre-deluge world—the nature and scope of his own concerns and those of his acquaintances, the seemingly deliberate loftiness of their talks, and (if you want to call it that) the ivory-tower spirit of their existence on a continent approaching crisis—may give to the older generation a pang of controversial nostalgia. Younger readers are not unlikely to think Fräulein Von Hattingberg's reminiscences over-romantic, somewhat stilted, or even gushing. But admirers of Rilke of any age group will be grateful to his indefatigable publishers for making the valuable and fascinating material this volume contains accessible in this country.



## Our Debt to Rome

THE CLASSICAL TRADITION. By Gilbert Highet. New York: Oxford University Press. 763 pp.. \$6.

By C. A. ROBINSON, JR.

THIS is one of those rare books that accomplishes several important things at once. Not that the main theme is not big enough in itself, for Gilbert Highet has set himself the unique task of outlining the chief ways in which Greek and Latin influence has molded the literatures of Western Europe and America. Only a very learned man could have attempted this but, fortunately, Highet carries his learning lightly and writes charmingly. In a sense he has given us a series of delightful essays on the world's great authors since the fall of the Roman Empire, but in another sense this is a story of how individual writers were caught up in the crises of their day, in wars and revolutions, plagues and crusades. With the canniness of his Scottish background, Highet has provided a table of contents that runs to twenty-four pages, as if to invite the reader to begin almost anywhere.

The chapter on Dante, for example, is an excursion into the Middle Ages, followed immediately by a picture of man's groping toward classical civilization, a wider horizon, a new mental attitude. This means Petrarch, but instead of presenting a monotonous medley of a writer and his works, Highet makes us feel what it must have been like to have been born in exile and, as a citizen of the world, to have traveled freely and joyously through Italy, France, and the Rhineland. This at a time when you did not visit libraries to discover some new and doubtless small point but to unearth the works of a great man. And so in 1345 Petrarch found in the cathedral library of Verona a manuscript containing a vast number of Cicero's personal letters, copied them out in his own hand, and settled down to an exhaustive study of a many-sided character, which, through him, became one of the forces that formed the Renaissance ideal of humanism.

Professor Highet brings his absorbing study down through the centuries to Joyce, Eliot, and Gide. If we learn how professional classicists rattled dry bones until they killed a great subject (in so far as they had the power), we also see that much of the best poetry and prose written in Western countries represents a continuous stream flowing from its source in Greece to the present day. Civilization, Highet reminds us, is the life of the mind. Though the Romans built a vast empire of tremendous power

and wealth, they did not rest content with an achievement that would have left them as dead as the Assyrians. They realized that civilization means education and set about getting an education in literature from the Greeks. Greece was not as rich as Egypt nor as powerful as Persia, but it did create permanent possessions for the mind and passed them on to the Romans and hence to us, so that if we choose, we may enrich and enjoy our only imperishable possession, our soul.

C. A. Robinson, Jr., professor of classics at Brown University, is author of "Hellenic History," "Alexander the Great," and other books.

## Belles-Lettres Notes

FRANZ KAFKA AND PRAGUE, by Pavel Eisner. Golden Griffin Books, New York. \$3. This essay helps to explain the enigmatic personality and writings of Kafka by describing the influence of his environment on him and his works. He was raised in a spiritual ghetto of some complexity. As an alien German among Czechs, and as an alien Jew among Germans and Czechs, he suffered from a double rootlessness. It affected not only the plots of his stories, with their strange hallucinatory atmosphere, but his characters and his very language. All this is set forth with abundant insight and proportion by Mr. Eisner, who recognizes that his is not the only key to unlock Kafka. But his pretentious and pedantic style has not been improved by his translators, and his book is eccentrically set up and adorned with beautiful but irrelevant photographs of Prague.

THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL NOVEL, by Ernest E. Leisy. University of Oklahoma Press. \$3.75. Whatever qualities the American historical novel may lack, it has the quality of being widely read and for that reason at least it deserves an intelligent and documented study such as this. Professor Leisy chooses his examples from the rise of the genre, in the early nineteenth century, and follows it down to 1949—which enables him to include such first-rate novels as those of A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Grouping them by their historical backgrounds, he starts with Colonial America and proceeds through the Revolution, the Westward movement, the Civil War, and ends with the period of national expansion up to the Spanish-American War. He treats a vast number of books and adds a long appendix for the overflow. Both as a bibliography and as a significant analysis his book is valuable. —ROBERT HALSBAND.



# Seeing Things

## ACADEMICIAN EXTRAORDINARY

THE STYLE is the man. Of writers we know this to be true, and certainly of no writer is it truer than of Winston Churchill. But is it equally true of painters? Of most painters yes, though not of Mr. Churchill. In this, as in nearly everything else, he is exceptional. If his personality and activity were known to us only by the eighteen colored reproductions of his brush work included in "Painting as a Pastime,"\* we would, to put it mildly, be misled.

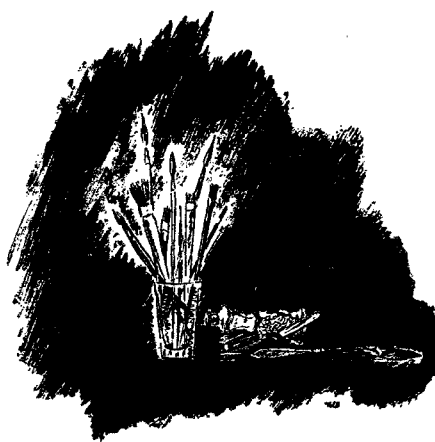
These Churchill paintings are not the products of an amateur who mistakes a filled canvas for a good one. Their touch is professional. Their colors are pleasant and bright, even if in some of the landscapes they are almost too pretty-pretty in a postcard manner. Most of these pictures have a certain charm, and a few can claim more than this, possessed as they are of real delicacy and grace.

Nevertheless, were all we know of Mr. Churchill to be deduced from these paintings, we would indeed be misled. Our first guess, our inevitable guess, would be that the man who had done them must be a Royal Academician. The paintings are sufficiently conventional to persuade us of this. So far, of course, we would be right because Mr. Churchill is a member of the Royal Academy; in fact, he is the only part-time painter on its roster. On it he is listed, with accuracy, as Honorary Academician Extraordinary.

From then on, however, our surmises would be wrong. For we would swear the man who did these paintings must be a soft-spoken fellow, calm and mousy, and very much at peace in a peaceful world. We would assume that his schedule was uncrowded, his life unrushed. We would suspect him of avoiding action and of having been protected from violence of any sort. We would know that he had traveled, but we would imagine him as creeping quietly into one sleepy resort after another, seeking the sun's warmth and finding inner tranquility.

Dedicated as his thinking would seem to be to flower arrangements, aristocratic interiors, quaint fishing vessels securely beached or moored,

waveless lakes, dreamy mountains, and trees unblown by any breezes, we would feel safe from contradiction were we to state that his mind was tightly shut against every kind of storm and bolted against upheavals, naval, military, and political. We might be tempted to go even further and maintain, since all his chairs, little boats, beaches, groves, and rooms are without occupants (except in two canvases where it is difficult to tell



whether the people are male or female, mortals or penguins), that he had no interest in men and no knowledge of their tempestuous ways. In short, we would be persuaded that here was an artist, lacking in gusto but appreciative of nature, whose unruffled temperament was forever in a vacation mood.

Such deductions would, of course, be almost wholly false. Few painters have put as little of themselves into their paintings as Mr. Churchill has done. There is a reason for this. He has turned to oils not only to take a vacation but to take a vacation from himself. Even if this had not been his reason, how could Mr. Churchill or anyone else be expected to do full justice on canvas to the many lives he has lived, his multitude of talents, the countless adventures he has survived, or the dimensions of his spirit?

No known colors are sufficiently strong to suggest his colorful personality. No wall or ceiling is large enough to contain the tumultuous mural of his careers. Paintings by Mr. Churchill are one thing; paintings which would be truly Churchillian, quite another. To achieve Churchillian

stature, they would have to possess something of the muscularity of Michelangelo, the vitality without the fleshiness of Rubens, the historical sweep of Le Brun, David's interest in court pageantry, the energy of Gericault, the romanticism of Delacroix, the drama of Goya, Meissonier's eye for military details, the dash of Sargent, Winslow Homer's and Tom Lea's feeling for ships and the sea, and the informed accuracy of the combat artists in all the services who, during wartime, recorded the trials of men in uniform.

Mr. Churchill is one of this planet's most flamboyant figures. He is an anachronism not because his politics are so conservative but because his endowments are so varied. The past, however, has never made a richer, livelier, or more vital contribution to the present than in his case. In many respects Mr. Churchill is the greatest of the Edwardians; in others, the last of the greater Elizabethans. The smokescreen created by his cigars cannot hide the fact that he has faced our world and enriched it as a reincarnation of the Renaissance Man. Certainly, for sheer virtuosity we have not seen his equal in our time, nor are parallels in other epochs easy to find.

Had the Duke of Marlborough been the Elder Pitt and the Elder Pitt, Gibbon, the result might have been named Winston Churchill. Mr. Churchill is a writing man who is a man of action; a soldier who turned war correspondent; a war correspondent who entered politics; a politician who emerged as a statesman; a statesman who excels as a strategist, and an orator whose words have been worth battalions. He is an historian who has made even more history than he has written. His energies are furious, his courage without limits, and his appetite for living so enormous that once someone rightly said life has melted in his mouth like butter.

CONSIDERING everything else that he has managed to get done, it is not surprising that he should have also found time to paint. Nor is it surprising that the two delectable essays "Hobbies" and "Painting as a Pastime," now joined together under the title of the latter, should have first appeared in a book by Mr. Churchill called "Amid These Storms" (1932). There they concluded with the sudden hush of an armistice a volume all turbulence and battle. Since 't was chiefly devoted to such matters as murderous anarchists, political clashes, meetings with the Kaiser at two maneuvers before World War I, memories of trench warfare in 1916, the U-Boat menace, and an account of Mr. Churchill's experiences in the air in 1912, when avia-

(Continued on page 39)

\*PAINTING AS A PASTIME. By Winston S. Churchill. New York: Whittlesey House. 32 pp. 18 color plates. \$2.50.