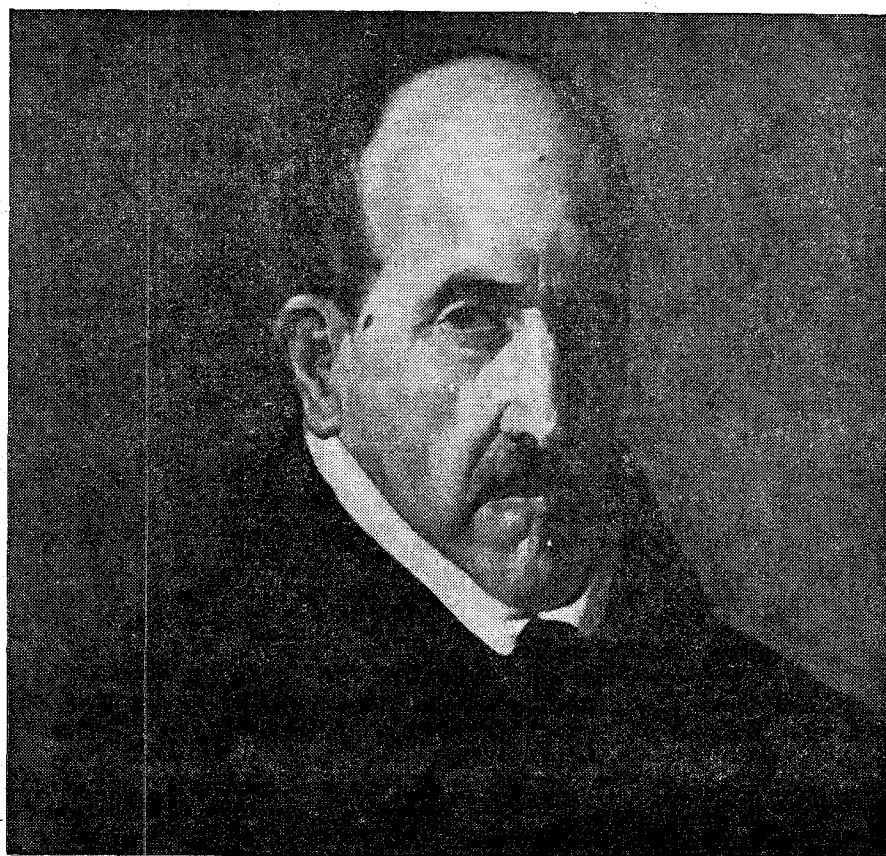


be understood, rather, as a phase in the development of French civilization as a whole, reflected in the visual arts. At the end of the fifteenth century France was still a loose grouping of feudal territories; the position of artistic leadership it had gained as the fountainhead of the Gothic style in the age of the great cathedrals had shifted long since to Italy and the Netherlands. Two hundred years later France was the dominant power on the Continent, politically as well as culturally, and Paris had succeeded Rome as the artistic capital of the Western world.

THE unifying theme of Professor Blunt's book, then, is the emergence of the national tradition that has given such strength and continuity to the achievements of French art ever since the reign of Louis XIV. The growth of this tradition, however, resembles nothing less than a simple upward curve. Geographically and spiritually France is a mediator between the Germanic North and the Latin South; its art has always been nourished from both sources without giving permanent allegiance to either, as if engaged in a never-ending search for the perfect synthesis.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the movements of French taste make a particularly complex pattern. They were, moreover, shaped to an extraordinary degree by political and social events, such as the Italian campaigns of Charles VIII, Louis XII, and Francis I; which accelerated the influx of Renaissance forms, or the tightly controlled system of art instruction and patronage set up by Colbert as part of his general administrative reforms. Frenchmen have long acknowledged this fact by using the names of their rulers to designate artistic styles, and Professor Blunt, too, takes account of it.

At first glance such a scheme might seem overly systematic, but the wealth and variety of material presented in these three hundred pages could hardly have been organized more clearly and efficiently. The lesser ramifications of the subject have for the most part been relegated to the notes, so that the text as a whole has an astonishing degree of continuity and balance. If the author speaks with greater eloquence of François Mansart or Nicolas Poussin than of certain earlier masters, no one will begrudge his special enthusiasms, which only serve to enhance an account that remains at all times a happy blend of analytical scholarship and sympathetic insight. We shall be fortunate indeed if other volumes of the Pelican History of Art reach the same level of distinction.



—From "Velazquez."

Velazquez's portrait of Luis de Gongora y Argote—a famous Spanish poet.

Painter of the Planet King

"Velazquez" (Random House, 101 pp. \$7.50) is an album of reproductions of the Spanish artist's pictures, fifty-three in color. The introduction and interleaving text by the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset has been translated by C. David Ley. The work is reviewed below by Professor José López-Rey of New York University, author of "Goya's Caprichos" and other works.

By José López-Rey

IT IS with a double interest that we approach an essay by a well-known man of letters on a great artist. The essayist may, on the one hand, quicken us to a new enjoyment of works we have delighted in before; he may also take us into the intricacies of his own mind either by identifying it with his hero's, or by depicting his subject as a counter-figure to himself.

For a volume of reproductions of Velazquez's pictures brought out in book form by Random House José Ortega y Gasset has written an introduction and interleaving text. In the

former, entitled "Velazquez and His Fame," Ortega expresses the opinion that Velazquez's reputation as a painter did not travel far beyond the royal chambers where "until a hundred years ago his work lay concealed." Instead, the fame of the painter to Philip IV was from the beginning "official," and "there was none of that direct enthusiasm behind it which the connoisseurs of art would have felt for his works if they had been able to see them." Even after he had painted the portrait of Pope Innocent X Velazquez's reputation in Italy "persisted in a rather unnoticed way." And throughout the eighteenth century the artist's fame was dim even in Spain; it was only between 1880 and 1920 that his greatness was fully recognized. Today it is again on the wane.

Those acquainted with the fortunes of Velazquez's renown through the centuries may justifiably take exception to most of these statements. It is, for instance, unquestionable that in the artist's own lifetime a sizable number of the works he did after his appointment as painter to the King were sent abroad or found their way

into private Spanish collections. Moreover, the notion that the pictures kept in the Royal Palace were inaccessible to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century connoisseurs is easily disproved; that the Italian public and artists were indifferent to the pictures done by Velazquez in Italy can be disputed merely by making fuller quotations from the sources which Ortega cites. As for the attitude of the Spanish, the testimony of Quevedo, a writer who was never overanxious to agree with official views, is one of several pieces of evidence that there was direct enthusiasm behind Velazquez's fame.

Nor can one resist pointing out such inaccuracies as Ortega's statement that Palomino (whose book on the lives of Spanish artists appeared in 1724) was Velazquez's "first" biographer, and that he "wrote twenty years after the painter's death"; or his assertion that the opinions of Goya, who openly expressed his admiration for Velazquez, "were not respected in his time."

SUCH inaccuracies, as well as some of Ortega's sweeping statements, will discomfort the knowledgeable reader. Few, however, will quarrel with the author's acceptance of the more familiar view that Velazquez "spared all his energy for his artistic endeavors," or with his well-reasoned rejection of the belief that Velazquez's palace duties prevented the artist from painting a larger number of pictures. Still fewer will nowadays dissent from the opinion that Velazquez remained "honestly faithful to what he considered the true aim of painting," without ever lowering the standard he had set for himself from the start of his career. Whether or not Ortega so intended it, the limited fame which he attributes to Velazquez results in enhancing the painter's integrity.

Ortega, in turning once more from his favorite philosophic themes to art history, has undertaken what many a critic or historian might have refused; he has written a series of interleaving texts for a selection of paintings not of his own choice. This affords him an opportunity to elaborate upon the points he raises in the introduction.

It was perhaps unnecessary to include in a book directed to the layman pictures whose authenticity is admittedly dubious or has been convincingly rejected. The questionable works, however, have been so noted in the list of illustrations. As for the quality of the plates, fifty-three of which are in color, one may say that as a whole they meet today's standards.

The Books of Princes

"Italian Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library" (Pierpont Morgan Library. 156 pp., 78 plates. \$20) is a descriptive survey of the principal illuminated manuscripts, dating from the sixth to sixteenth centuries, in that library. The catalogue was compiled by Meta Harrsen and George K. Boyce; there is an introduction by Bernard Berenson. Below the work is reviewed by Harry Bober, assistant professor of fine arts at Harvard University.

By Harry Bober

WITH discrimination and skill, drawn from years of experience with people who enjoy manuscripts for whatever reasons, the Pierpont Morgan Library has issued a splendid book to meet diverse needs and

interests. Such is the perfection in presentation that book-lovers will prize "Italian Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library" as much for itself as for its content. This is not a catalogue in any strict sense and, in fact, the word has been deliberately avoided. This is a "descriptive survey" covering 103 illuminated manuscripts and twenty-two autograph letters and documents, constituting the finest collection in America. Plates (some in color) reproduce illustrations from more than half of the manuscripts; descriptive data for each item contain all essential information in concentrated and readable form without cumbersome bibliographical apparatus. Herewith is initiated a long-range plan for systematic publication of all important medieval and Renaissance manuscripts now housed in the "noble precincts" of 33 East 36th Street, New York City.

Is there any person for whom the



—The Pierpont Morgan Library.

"Adoration of the Magi": illustration from a sixteenth-century Milanese choirbook.