

THE CONNOISSEUR, WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED INTERNATIONAL STUDIO

lips seemed 'as much part of the wind and the sea as the gulls and dolphins that soared or plunged about them in beauty that changed from moment to moment.' The pictures, which set the mind dreaming of a thousand years of adventure and discovery, are from photographs of actual models, admirably reproduced in half-tone, and with a flour-de-pâtes frontispiece of a Flemish carrack of 1450, reconstructed by Mr. Morton Nance himself from an old print signed W. A. and a few excellent drawings by the same accomplished hand. There are descriptive notes on the models illustrated, and a list of the principal museums and other institutions in Europe and America which contain ship models, compiled by Mr. Frank G. G. Carr, Director of the Maritime Museum, Greenwich.—E. C.

OSKAR KOKOSCHKA

By James Plant

(London: Max Parrish, 15s.)

THE painter with whom this book is concerned is a man of celebrity. Eighteen major exhibitions of his works are here recorded and there are two pages of bibliography. Also a photograph, comparing oddly with the self-portrait which serves as frontispiece. What strikes us most about his work is his preoccupation with the processes of decomposition and physical decay. His forms disintegrate and slobber—the landscapes almost as much as the figures. And of course we may be told that the world is slipping back into chaos and the primeval slime and painting should do the same. Even when occasionally we see some power of draughtsmanship (as in *Dancing couple, green version*) which expresses something of the smoothness which is an attractive quality of modern dancing, the painting seems vulgar and botched.

Again, we might argue that to suggest smoothness by a technique which is 'anything but' is already a major feat. It sounds verbally laudable but our subconscious rebels at the sight of the picture. It may be the legitimate result of a world cataclysm but it is not, we submit, good painting. The dialogue between the modernist painter and the conservative critic runs on the lines of that recorded by James Agate between himself and the lady who nursed him during his last illness—

Agate: 'Look into my face: do you see there any of that intense spiritual beauty which we are told results from prolonged physical suffering?'

Nurse: 'No, dear.'—W. B.

EL GRECO

By Ludvig Goldscheider

(Oxford and London: The Phaidon Press Ltd. 30s. net)

ALTHOUGH very kind and patient, Randolph Schwabe used sometimes to complain that he was tired of being told that El Greco was 'flameliike.' Yet the phrase was not more foolish than many others that persecute the unfortunate who is condemned to read examination papers dealing with the history of art. That perpetual wriggle up the chimney of so many arms and legs, so nonstrous long and thin! It makes the same insistent claim on our attention as does the open fire in our grate if it does not offer quite so satisfying an entertainment. As sensational journalism has come to replace criticism, the flames have come to be regarded as those of an *auto-da-fé* and El Greco as the predestined prophet of a period of religious strife, in which each party was piously bent on the salvation of the other by way of torture and death. Nothing in all this is very admirable, but it is the subject with which this volume deals, and its sensational flavour is rather enhanced (if the artist concerned is a little cheapened) by the use of a method of reproduction which tends to make the pictures flash out in violent contrasts of white on black without intervening tones—rather like the larger and stickier photographic illustrated papers on the bookstalls.

And yet sometimes the enlargement of certain of these details is worth while. They establish with what sensitiveness El Greco can

handle a group of portrait heads, those heads which he will nevertheless so minimize in relation to his endlessly diffuse *ensemble*. When Mr. Goldscheider, dealing with the steady zone of portraits crossing the *Burial of Count Orgaz*, invokes comparison with certain Dutch portrait groups, we realize how much painting has owed to that northern taste for shapes which are sturdy and reasonably stabilized—as against the perpetual sinuosities of Mediterranean draughtsmanship. The trouble with El Greco is that his form is 'ropy'—and then that it lacks the articulate quality which man, as an articulate animal, demands. Forms that bend like india-rubber might be satisfying to an intellectual jelly-fish. India-rubber?—perhaps his figures are formed rather of that artistically unappetizing material—ectoplasm.

And of course, with his glassy-eyed saints ogling the skies, he is sentimentally akin to Guido Reni with his Jesuitical treacle—and so, through the *Infant Samuel*, to *The Soul's Awakening*. But these poor relations may not be welcomed by his more fervent admirers. Neither were the Browning Society pleased when some indiscreet genealogist unearthed for the poet an ancestor who was a butler. But their protests failed to move the man of parchments, who merely said that the truth was the truth—'*et praevalabit.*'—W. B.

A. V. Sutherland-Graeme

CHATS ON OLD PEWTER

By H. J. L. J. Massé (1911). Revised Edition

Edited by Ronald F. Michaelis

(Hon. Librarian, Society of Pewter Collectors)

(London: Ernest Benn Ltd. 12s. 6d.)

IT is no easy task to overhaul the work of a Master, even after a lapse of nearly forty years. Massé was a Master—practically the only one—of his subject when this book was first published; he was also a worker in metal and sometime President of the Art Workers' Guild, which was a great asset to him; and it is obvious to one who knew him that the present publishers could not have made a better selection when they asked Mr. Michaelis to prepare this revised edition; for in historical knowledge and in practical application he follows the Massé tradition, and, in addition, he is himself a collector, which Massé never was—the latter once informed the writer that he had never owned a piece of pewter in his life. The thirteen original chapters remain and cover all aspects of the subject most useful to the collector, taking him through a course on 'fakes,' prices, the composition of the metal, what was made in it and how, in various countries, it was decorated; and finally introducing him to the craftsmen themselves in a series of chapters dealing with marking in general, and with the touches struck upon the London and Edinburgh touch plates and their owners' names, set forth in more convenient form than in any previous work.

The Editor has, rightly, dealt lightly with some of these chapters; others, however, and in particular those dealing with 'fakes,' prices, what was made, and ecclesiastical ware, have required considerable revision. Faking, that bugbear of collectors, is far more clever nowadays; prices are more standardized—and at a higher level, and taste has changed; late Continental pieces find little favour now.

As regards Church plate, although the Editor has passed Massé's outburst against Faculties, he has wisely counterbalanced it by his remarks, in Chapter I, on the improper alienation of Church property.

The lists of pewterers given in Chapter XII provide, perhaps, the most striking example of modern research. Of the 1,090 touches which appeared upon the London touch plates in 1911 (there are now 1,093), all but 137 are now definitely allocated, some 50 more than were known to Cotterell in 1929; in this connexion, in view of Massé's statements on pages 143 and 146, which have apparently escaped from the sieve, it should perhaps be said that Pewterers' Hall no longer stands.

This book will be welcomed by all who have a reverence for the ancient crafts, and in particular by pewter collectors; although a few old friends remain, the majority of the illustrations are new and excellent (though that showing spoons with Royal portrait finials should preferably have been printed the other way up!).—A. V. S.-G.