

SPECIAL BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS FEASTING THE EYE

by Anne Hollander

Picture books continue to be compelling, whatever form they take, whether the primary aim is to show pictures and explain them in a text or to write a text illuminated by pictures. The images carry the initial appeal in either case, and the faults or virtues of a book can sometimes be masked by its visual glamour, whatever value that may have in itself. On the other hand, awkward or tawdry finery may cloak a thoroughbred, or grim weeds a shallow flirt, and many books are not exactly what they seem. At one remote time gloriously illuminated books could be trusted to boil down to prayers or scripture or some other irreproachable text automatically worthy of any amount of fancy adornment, presumably pleasing to a generous God. Now, however, things are not so simple.

Among other complexities, entrenched film conventions have lately made a new kind of book acceptable that is much more like a frozen documentary movie. Pictures are presented interspersed with a text that resembles a voice-over narration, and the two are meant to be absorbed together smoothly and quickly, with cinematic immediacy. Such books

Anne Hollander is at work on a book about the clothed form in art.

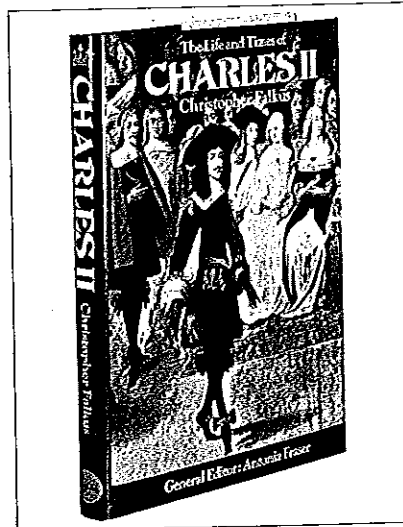
are highly attractive and may deal equally well with ephemeral subject matter or serious scholarly material. The success of the results depends in the first case entirely on the level of taste, and in the second on the level of responsibility: the ability to provide an accurate text (however seductively generalized) correctly identified pictures, and a decent bibliography.

Some of the best in the genre of scholarly picture-book-documentary are the brief, brilliant studies of kings and queens of England, presently appearing under the general editorship of Antonia Fraser in individual volumes by assorted English historians. Now available are *Elizabeth I* by Neville Williams, *Charles II* by Christopher Falkus, and *Edward VII* by Keith Middlemas (all Doubleday, \$10). These are all well-constructed biographical essays, beautifully interlarded with pictures of each monarch and his circle, important documents in facsimile, photographs of relevant buildings, cartoons, maps, etc. The one on Charles II has plenty of statesmanship, warfare, and general cultural observation to balance the material about the famous mistresses, and there is a useful bibliography. It would be an even more satisfy-

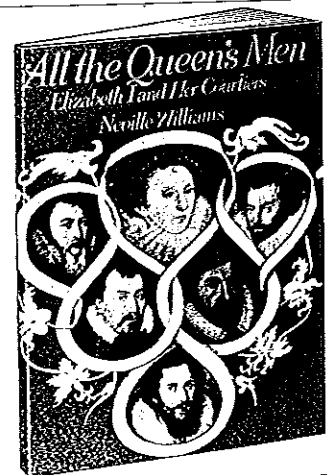
modern times; but he was born in 1841, and his lifetime saw staggering changes in the world. The pictures of course include many contemporary photographs—some of this king's famous mistresses, too—which are a good leavening for the usual engravings, posters, paintings, and maps.



The life and times of Elizabeth may prove more instantly appealing than the other two, considering the recent wave of general interest in the lady; and the book is distinguished by having two helpful genealogical tables and a classified bibliography, although still no enough dates. The material in the book proves yet again how extraordinary the woman and her country were in her day and the pictures, besides the familiar portraits, include photographs of famous houses, musical scores, letters in facsimile, and a contemporary diagram outlining the murder of Darnley. Another book about the same subject and period is *All the Queen's Men* also by Neville Williams (Macmillan, \$12.95), which



ing book if there were a genealogical table and if everyone's date of birth and death were given at the first mention of his name, or at least in the index. Also the author uses the word disinterested to mean uninterested, a common error but uncommon in England. The book on Edward VII is particularly fascinating, being so much involved with the reign of Queen Victoria, whose long life kept her son a prince for sixty years and a king for less than ten. Edward died before World War I and the beginning of



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concentrates at a little greater length on Elizabeth's techniques for holding court and wielding power among her distinguished contemporaries. This is a more thorough and more conventional historical essay, specifically on the individual use of political power; and the many pictures are chiefly portraits. All these volumes show how lucky the British are to be able to divide their history into reigns, and to think of past events as formed in clusters around individuals who are attractively laden with all the mystery and trappings of kingship. Another book in similar format about the same royal crew is *The Spanish Armadas* by Winston Graham (Doubleday, \$14.95). This one, incidentally, has a good list of notes on all the pictures, which, besides the inevitable portraits, include contemporary military maps and plans of ships. It is the dramatic story of the hostilities developing between Spain and England during the second half of the sixteenth century, which were finally expressed in a number of great naval engagements, beginning with the famous



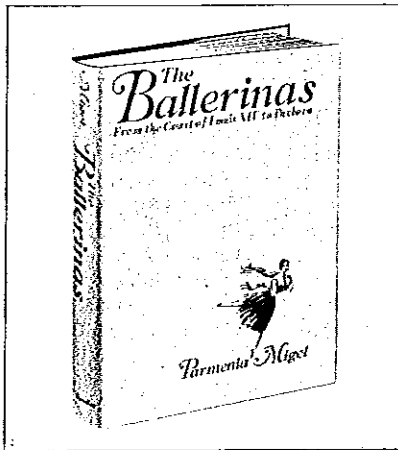
armada of 1588. Mr. Graham is a novelist, and the book is thrillingly narrated.

For those specifically interested in the details of historical warfare, there is the large and gaudy *Great Military Sieges* by Vezio Melegari (Crowell, \$19.95). This book is bursting with color, metaphorically and actually. More than seventy famous sieges, from the wars of legendary times down to Dien Bien Phu, are vividly described and accompanied by hundreds of pictures, not all of them sufficiently identified or absolutely apt. The look of German soldiers in 1529, for example, should not be illustrated by a nineteenth-century rendering but by contemporary engravings, which are plentiful, more accurate, and visually much more satisfying. The same is true for sixteenth-century French costume. Along with the actual circumstances of each siege, the techniques, machinery, and armor are described and illustrated to give a general idea of the developing technology of warfare all over the globe. Anecdote is plentiful, usually concentrating on civilian courage, feminine heroism, and horrors. In grim fact, of course, a siege is one of the worst things in war;

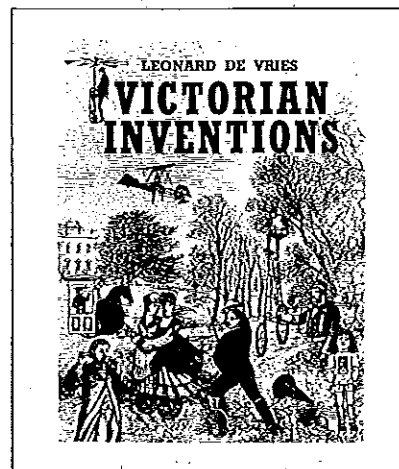
and such a formidable array of them, which is still only a selection, is hard to swallow with pleasure in spite of, or perhaps because of, the bright hues and operatic language in which it is presented here.

For a thorough study of the birth of an effective offensive weapon, however, minus the dazzle of monarchy or the romance of remote times, there is *The American Steel Navy*, a photographic history of the U.S. Navy from the introduction of the steel hull in 1883 to the cruise of the Great White Fleet 1907-1909, by Comdr. John D. Alden (American Heritage Press, \$29.95). There is no color in this book; it is more than ever like a serious black-and-white documentary film, with a serviceable text flowing in and out among hundreds of elaborately captioned photographs. These chronicle the building of our modern navy—men, ships, and arms alike—out of the bits and scraps left over after the Civil War. This is for impassioned schoolboys (or girls) of any age who already love naval expertise without needing to be seduced by any gratuitous glamour.

A serious consideration of one of the arts of peace is *The Ballerinas* by Parmenia Migel (Macmillan, \$10.95). This is a collection of biographical pieces about the important ballet dancers, from



the birth of the form in the seventeenth century to the days of the imperial theater in Russia—but not through them. Pavlova and her famous colleagues are mentioned only as students, and the book gives thorough data on dancers only up through Fanny Cerrito (1817-1909), including their principal accomplishments and their milieu. There are also some general chapters on what followed the Romantic Ballet. The author



has taken pains to check sources and correct errors of long standing, and she gives proper acknowledgment to all the recognized authorities on the subject in her excellent notes and bibliography. The illustrations are from her own collection, which makes most of them seem refreshingly new, particularly a wonderful one of Taglioni in old age.

Celebration of the great nineteenth century and all its productions is now in full swing. Further demonstrating the undeniable cleverness of our ancestors is *Victorian Inventions* by Leonard de Vries (American Heritage Press, \$10.). The term "Victorian," which should only refer to England, here just means the period between 1865 and 1900, during which appeared the nearly 200 magazine articles in this book, each describing a different ingenious invention, most of them with engravings to illustrate the details. The articles are printed as they appeared in one or another of three magazines—*Scientific American*, *La Nature* (France), and *De Natuur* (Holland). The Dutch and French articles have been translated, and the whole has been set in uniform type intended to suggest the old days. No author's commentary about historical background or subsequent follow-up is given, so that the good sense or madness of the contrivances speak for themselves; and the eager hope with which they were first made public is expressed in the original prose. Some developed into the everyday stuff of present life—the telephone, the escalator—while others were clearly born to fade, like a handy stool built inside the modish bustle of 1887 ("Comfort and Fashion Happily United").

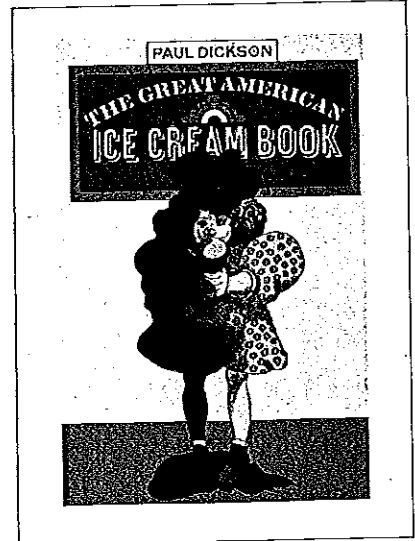
The word "Victorian" is correctly applied and brilliantly illuminated in *The Victorian Country House* by Mark Girouard (Oxford University Press,

\$41.). This vast and satisfying book is in part a series of revised articles on individual houses from the British magazine *Country Life*. The rest is an exhaustive essay, beginning with the distinction between a house in the country and a true "country house," which is intended as the center of an estate complete with tenants, park, and lodges—no mere villas and vicarages here. The Victorian period saw the construction of an unbelievable number of palatial (or rather castlelike, in view of the prevailing style) country mansions, many built with fortunes made in such things as wool, biscuits, and guano. The introductory material includes a succinct essay on the attitudes and social background that produced such buildings, together with a breakdown of the specific requirements of a "gentleman's residence" and some discussion of the architects employed to carry them out. Any devoted reader of nineteenth-century fiction ought to study this book, if only for the plans. These perfectly clarify in fascinating detail the whole confusing world of the conservatory, billiard room, butler's pantry, morning room, night nursery, scullery, etc., now encountered only in books. The life once led in these unbelievable houses (the opulent clothes, the incredible meals) has vanished. Most of the houses have become schools and orphanages while continuing to resemble cathedrals and railroad stations. But their design, construction, and embellishment remain to testify to (in the author's words) the "mixture of piety, snobbery, romanticism, idealism, and pretentiousness" that, combined with enormous wealth, caused them to arise in such numbers. The book is admirably documented, and all illustrations are keyed into the text; their lack of color is no drawback.

A colorful and very general view of English building is given in *A Pictorial History of English Architecture* by Sir John Betjeman (Macmillan, \$12.95). These chapters were also once intended

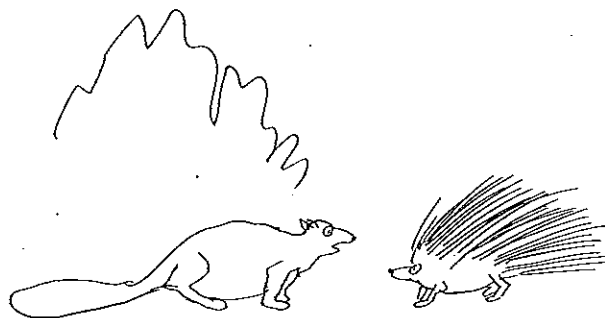
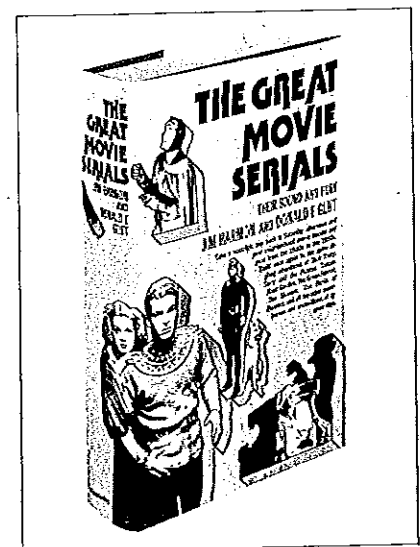
as magazine articles. The many pictures, most of them in color, have elaborate captions by Nicholas Taylor, and the style of the text is pleasantly conversational, moderately witty, very personal. Beginning with Iron Age earthworks in Dorset, Sir John makes observations on all forms of British architecture in all periods, including some graceful remarks about the present. He is concerned with the expressive role of buildings, and he means to communicate his own pleasure in appreciating it. This he accomplishes with characteristic tact and lack of pretension or sentimentality, at the same time smoothly conveying a lot of sound information.

In America, a sentimental sense of history is frequently expressed under the name of nostalgia, which lately has become highly marketable. Several books reveal this spirit by the gratuitous use of "great" in the title: *The Great American Ice Cream Book* by Paul Dickson (Atheneum, \$7.95); *The Great Movie Serials* by Jim Harmon and Donald F. Glut (Doubleday, \$7.95); and *The Wonderful Era of the Great Dance Bands* by Leo Walker (Doubleday, \$6.95). The book about ice cream is not entirely devoted to the sticky and mellow delights of the past. Other sections include a chapter on recipes for ice cream, rather unfortunately entitled "Making It," and a number of cheerful facts about the modern frozen-dessert industry including the development of the Popsicle, the Good Humor, and the Eskimo Pie. But of course there is also a chapter on how to construct sodas and sundaes from recipes dating back to 1903. Soda jerking, with its lingo, and ice-cream parlors generally are described and mourned, to the accompaniment of old photographs, cartoons, and ads. This is an interesting book, despite its deplorable chapter titles ("Just and Unjust Desserts," "The Creaming of America"), but it is probably less interesting than the volume on which it appears largely to depend—*Ice Cream*, a definitive text



by Prof. Wendell S. Arbuckle of the Department of Dairy Science at the University of Maryland, who incidentally is the man who invented a kosher ice cream. Mr. Dickson's general historical accuracy is called into question by his apparent belief that James II was the son of Charles I; but the jacket photo shows him to be engagingly fat, to do justice at least to his proper view of his subject.

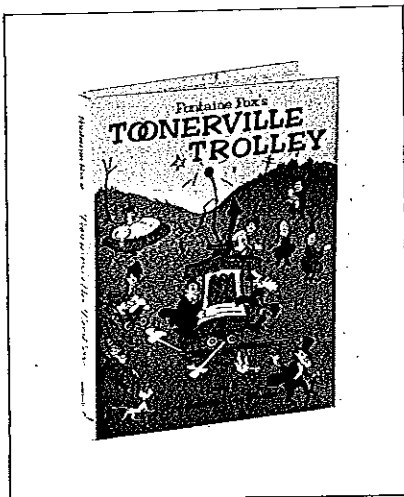
The book about dance bands is a rather pedestrian but absolutely respectable history of all such groups and their leaders, from Art Hickman (ca. 1915) to Guy Lombardo and Lawrence Welk. The black-and-white illustrations are mostly press photos and publicity shots of the musicians, but there are also posters, newspaper clippings, and sheet-music covers. The story of the movie serials confines itself to the era of sound, particularly the "golden age" between 1939 and 1942. The serial is evidently a



"How long have you been in acupuncture?"

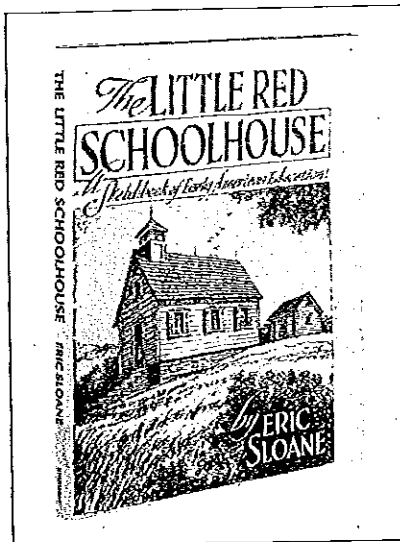
movie genre largely ignored by film historians, although the so-called cliff-hangers excelled in special effects and action shots. Serial directors, otherwise condemned to this poor relation of the B picture, were sometimes engaged to work on major A-pictures because of their special skills. Serial plots and their sources are divided up according to subject and discussed in the book along with the best-known actors. There are not very many illustrations, but the tone is seriously witty in the best journalistic mode. This would seem a good addition to a film enthusiast's library. *The International Encyclopedia of Film* (Crown, \$17.95), general editor, Dr. Roger Manvell, is disappointing, despite its huge size and scope, mainly because it is both incomplete and confusing—faults for which it annoyingly apologizes in the foreword. What it contains is absorbing to leaf through rather than useful for reference. *The Academy Awards: A Pictorial History* by Paul Michael (Crown, \$7.95) is the second, revised edition of this further exercise in nostalgia. Almost 300 black-and-white photographs, essays on the prize winners, and descriptions of each year's award ceremonies make up this book, which is well indexed and has lists of unsuccessful nominees and runners-up.

The vogue for celebrating past popular taste is not confined to the movies: *Fontaine Fox's Toonerville Trolley* compiled by Herb Galewitz and Don Winslow (Scribner's \$9.95) presents a large



bouquet of Fox's mildly funny, comfortable cartoons of a halcyon, semirural America. His drawing style, like the flavor of his humor, is dateless and changeless, from the earliest cartoons in 1915 until his retirement in 1955. It would consequently have been a good

idea to date the pictures, which can otherwise only be placed in time by their references to Eddy and Wally, strapless evening gowns, and television. In the world of Powerful Katrinka and the Terrible-Tempered Mr. Bang, such latter-day phenomena blend quite smoothly with turn-of-the-century ones like spittoons and chaperones. Another artist's view of a vanished America appears in *The Little Red Schoolhouse* by Eric Sloane (Doubleday, \$4.95). This is a modestly nostalgic little book about

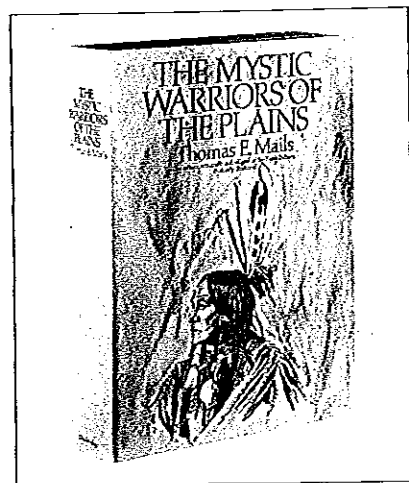


the trappings of early American education. Not only the buildings, but the desks, foot warmers, exercise books, and instruments of chastisement are shown in sketches and mullied over in a sentimental text, in which the author gets off a few inevitable nasty remarks about modern methods and institutions.

Missionary zeal as well as nostalgia may be expressed in the documentary-film manner, particularly about embattled people or threatened places. *Down Home* by Bob Adelman, text edited by Susan Hall (McGraw-Hill, \$16.95) is a photographic essay about the people of Wilcox County, Alabama. The brilliantly clear black-and-white pictures starkly reveal the black and white residents. The text is composed of their utterances, taken off tape. With some exceptions, the black folk tend to look noble in wretchedness while the white look grim, pinched, or fatuous. The text smells of its editing, but the pictures are very compelling. *Floor of the Sky* by David Plowden, edited with an introduction by John C. Mitchell (Sierra Club, \$19.75) is a beautifully controlled photographic study of the Great Plains, intended as a plea for the preservation of

a forgotten landscape now hopped over by jets or occasionally endured by train. The text is rhetorical, even poetic, but still not so eloquent as the magnificent photographs, both in color and black-and-white. These show not only the seamed faces of the inhabitants but the unbearable streets of desolate towns, elegant grain elevators, and always the overwhelming sky. The hardness of life for flora and fauna alike is manifest in both the pictures and the story of the Plains, from the days of the original trail blazers until now. Modern technology makes wheat farming feasible there since it is necessary—but never easy. People are leaving the Plains towns. It is all one great last picture show.

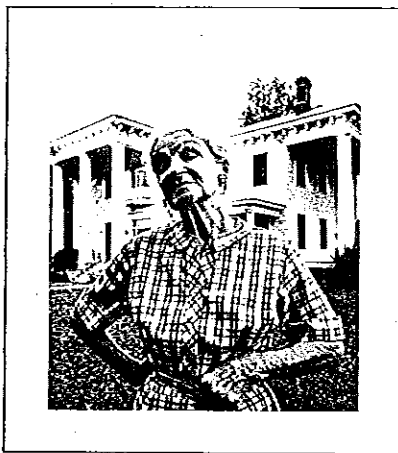
Quite a different kind of book on the original inhabitants of this area is *The Mystic Warriors of the Plains* by Thomas E. Mails (Doubleday, \$25.). This is a thorough examination of the whole culture of the Plains Indians, illustrated entirely with drawings and paintings. The latter are fairly dreadful, but the thousand or more drawings are both clear and evocative. The whole volume is reminiscent of prephotographic anthropological works filled with just such painstaking renderings, although this book eschews their tone of scientific detachment for one of zealous reverence, in keeping with the present fever of guilt about the Indians.



American self-absorption on a panoramic scale is monumentally exemplified by *American Civilization* edited by Daniel Boorstin (McGraw-Hill, \$29.95), an anthology of thirteen essays on all aspects of American life, presented as a portrait from the twentieth century by various hands, all illustrious authorities on politics, religion, education, etc. This huge book is swollen with vivid pictures suitably wide-ranging in genre; but they

are occasionally insufficiently identified, even in the index. Portrait photographs of modern public figures or snapshots of them taking part in important events should all have been dated, otherwise eventually it will be assumed that all undated modern photographs in the book were taken this year. An illustration for a Scott Fitzgerald story is given and dated, but the artist is not identified—which is a crime.

The great cities of the world need no special plea for attention, but they happily still continue to inspire praise. *Love Affair: A Venetian Journal* by Wright Morris (Harper & Row, \$12.50) is a breathtaking set of color photographs and accompanying blocks of prose. Mr. Morris again proves that he is a major photographer and wonderful writer. Both pictures and text are filled with visual and literary passion extraordinarily unhampered—given the subject—by any standard clichés. It has been remarked that nothing can be said about Venice that someone else hasn't already said; and one might certainly think that no one could take any new pictures of it. Mr. Morris has done both. Most of the pictures are characteristic, but unfamiliar. Venetian views as seen by a city dweller and lover: corners, alleys, sudden vistas from odd angles, the record of a hundred walks. The chunks of text—which face the pictures but have only a fragile connection with them—are the record of days of discovery spent establishing temporary residence in a dream ("A can opener is neither in the drawer nor the dictionary"). They are a chronicle of conversations, impressions, accidents, all expressed with a kind of fresh econ-

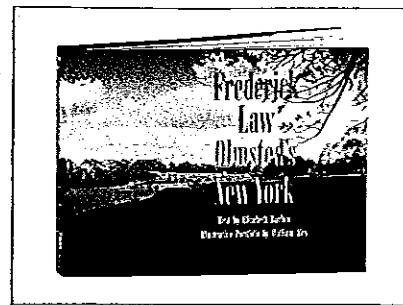


omy, which also characterizes the pictures. The beautiful old, sodden city is once more truly discovered. It is as if Mr. Morris had miraculously gone to Venice without ever having heard of it.

A dignified American cityscape, again from the well-combed past, is displayed in *Frederick Law Olmsted's New York*, text by Elizabeth Barlow, illustrative portfolio by William Alex (Praeger, \$12.50). Here is a talented and practical man's vision of what a city should be like, with drawings, engravings, and photographs showing the parks of New York during their conception, creation, and early use. The book is designed to accompany an exhibition at the Whitney Museum.

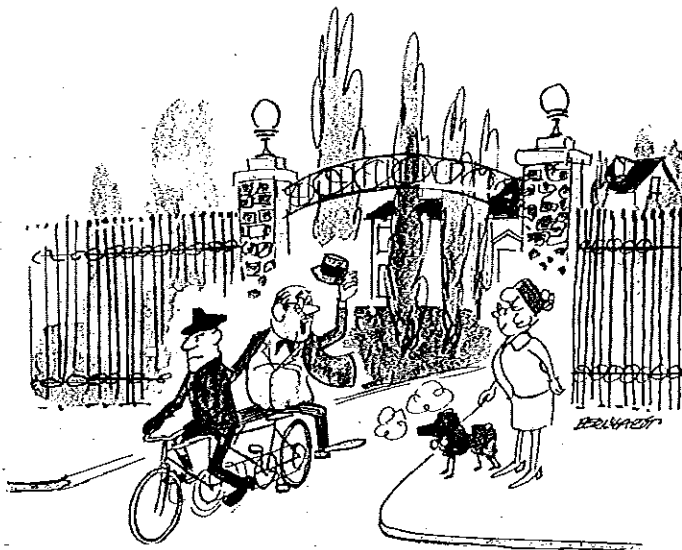
Picture books are always apt showcases for works of art, whatever other kind of material goes with them. *Sporting Art* by Stella A. Walker (Clarkson Potter, \$15.) examines that rarefied, intensely

English branch of painting that concentrates on animals and men participating in sports. There are various renderings of the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable, and a few glorified portraits



of the eatable as well in the form of prize sheep and oxen. These were commissioned and painted after animal breeding had taken hold as a gentleman's preoccupation, along with hunting, coursing, and coaching. *Ancient Greek Coins* by G. K. Jenkins (G. P. Putnam's Sons, \$25.) is a very satisfying old-fashioned history, nevertheless full of very seductive new photographs, all perfectly identified and keyed into the text. The book is a neat and practical size and very attractive even to a reader with no numismatic interests. There is an excellent index, bibliography, and glossary.

A pretentious, beautiful, and somewhat solemn effort is *Early Christian Art* by Pierre du Bourguet, S.J., translated from the French by Thomas Burton (Reynal & Co., \$29.95). The magnificent color plates are clearly often more beautiful than the works themselves, some of which are quite dim and scrappy. A vast amount of Christian painting, sculpture, and minor art is dealt with, together with its historical and sociological background, from the early clandestine days



"It's the times, Mrs. Ames—we must all pitch in to fight air pollution!"

Ancient Greek Coins

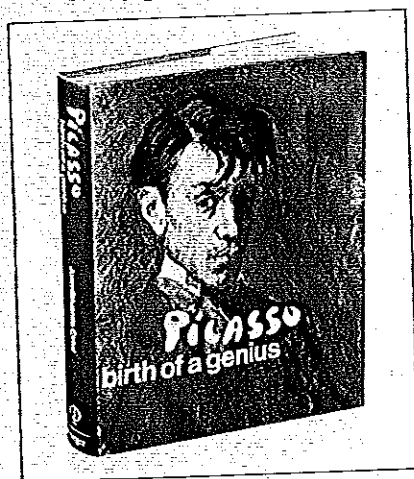


THE WORLD OF NUMISMATICS

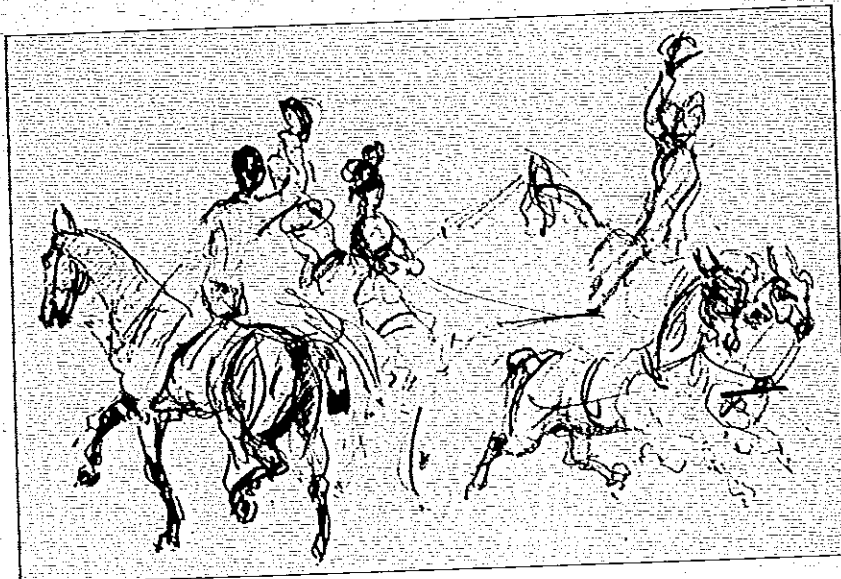
Books

around A.D. 200 until the close of the fourth century just before the division of the Eastern and Western churches. This book unfortunately has no index, but a good bibliography; and all the picture captions give dimensions. *Hidden Art in Nature*, "synchronies" by Oscar Forel (Harper & Row, \$30) is an overblown and pompous piece of conspicuous "appreciation," consisting of about fifty color photographs showing tiny strips of bark, patches of moss, or bits of fungus, each blown up and luxuriously mounted with no context or any other information except the botanical name of the tree it comes from. A portentous introduction ("it is always salutary to remind man of the ubiquity of the essential") is by Jean Rostand. We don't need it.

On the other hand we always need the works of great artists in reproduction. *Picasso: Birth of a Genius* by Juan-Eduardo Cirlot (Praeger, \$29.50) provides an extraordinary view of Picasso's very early attempts, beginning in 1894, when he was thirteen. These pictures have all lately come to light in Barcelona, where they were the property of the artist's family. The collection of hundreds of sketches, etchings, and paintings comes to an end in 1917; and they show the amazing variety of influences that could be assimilated by the young artist as his own distinctive genius emerged. Any artist's sketches are revealing personal documents, and some are treasures. *From the Sketchbooks of the Great Artists* by Claude Marks (Crowell, \$25) is a large and beautifully pre-



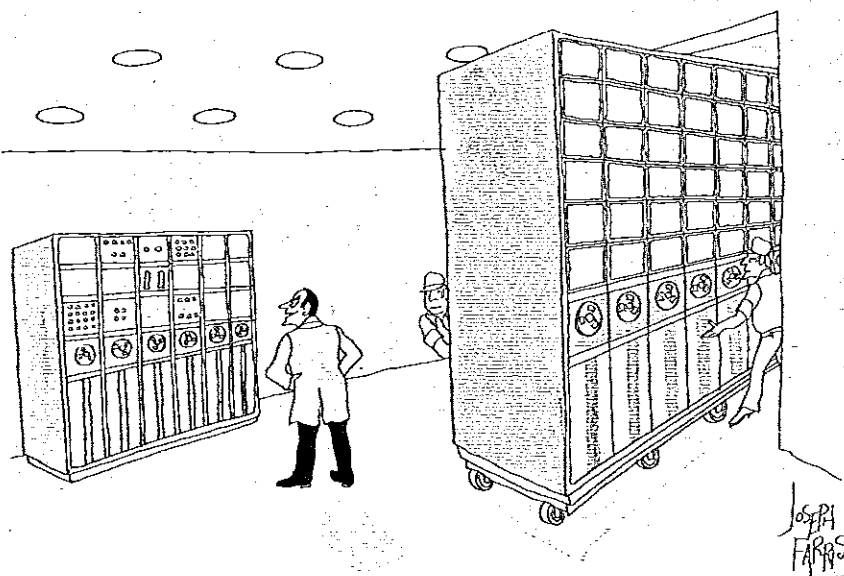
sented collection of drawings, most of them unfamiliar, from the works of more than sixty-five quite familiar artists. All the great names of Europe and America are here, dating from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries; unfortunately no Oriental artists are represented. This



book has a good text about the artists and excellent captions for the individual drawings, with the exact medium, dimensions, and present whereabouts of each. Two more books on individual artists are *Louise Nevelson* by Arnold Glimcher (Praeger, \$29.50) and *Rogier van der Weyden* by Martin Davies (Phaidon, \$38.50). The one on Nevelson is the first devoted to this sculptor; it has a satisfying number of pictures of her work, including some *in situ*, but not enough in color. The book on the great fifteenth-century Flemish painter also has very few color reproductions, but paradoxically this is not disappointing in a book of such sound scholarly apparatus, with so many necessary black-and-white illustrations.

Space does not allow a sufficient ap-

preciation of *Other Criteria* by Leo Steinberg (Oxford, \$17.50). These beautifully written essays deal with twentieth-century art profoundly and elegantly. They were individually conceived at different times, and they are concerned with ways of comprehending and defining both the whole nature of modern art, and the meaning of specific works, as distinct from their form. The author is a distinguished art historian, here turning his encompassing critical attention upon the phenomena of modern painting and sculpture, to determine their qualities of kinship with the past, to understand their real value, and to see the possible "other criteria" upon which to judge them. These pieces stimulate intellectual and moral effort as proper accompaniments to visual pleasure.



"Guess who's being replaced by a machine this time!"