

French Notes

TWO books by Ambroise Vollard.
Two books by Emile Hovelacque.
Two books by Albert Thibaudet.

Controversy has been raging about the Post-Impressionist exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. *About* is not the right word. *Apropos* of would be better, as the discussion had little to do with art itself. Some anonymous critics found the pictures immoral. Which provoked a rush to the museum. Disappointment followed. Some others were concerned only with the commercial side of the question, and suggested that Europe was trying to dump on America the productions which no longer fetched high prices over there.

Others incriminated the distorting influence of Post-Impressionism, and all foreign movements in general, on the genuine and unhampered development of young American painters in American schools. Yet a few consider that it was a remarkable exhibition; they have learned a great deal from it (not to find themselves better or worse on the next morning, only a little less ignorant). And this has awakened their interest in the lives of such painters as Renoir, Cézanne, Degas, Redon, Van Gogh, Matisse, etc. Not so long ago, much literature had suddenly multiplied around the personality of Paul Gauguin. Even "Noa Noa" and the *Journal* were quoted by our well informed. Concerning Renoir and Cézanne, nothing can be more highly recommended than Ambroise Vollard's two recent biographies.¹

Vollard himself has his place in the history of modern painting. A picture-dealer, but first of all a friend and a confidant of artists, a humorous giant whose fund of stories and anecdotes seems inexhaustible, and a keen appraiser of men and of pictures, Vollard is responsible for the "discovery" and recognition of several contemporary painters. His books contain no dogmatic development, no criticism ex cathedra. They are first-class biographies which give us good living portraits of the man Cézanne and of the man Renoir, as they stand facing their work and not thinking much about the "Hall of Fame" or post-mortem high prices. To any technician, to any intelligent amateur, "Cézanne" and the newly published "Renoir" will be good reading. With the rough, taciturn figure of Cézanne at Aix-en-Provence, contrasts the explosive, childish, and genial person of Renoir. And do not miss the story of the latter's dinner with Rodin. There Vollard is at his best.

In a wholly different field, Emile Hovelacque is also the author of two recent volumes, "China" (1920) and "Japan" (1921).² M. Hovelacque, who is a General Inspector of Public Education in France, is known in this country for his "Les Etats-Unis et la Guerre",³ and for possessing the most portentous beard ever sent on a mission from France to America.

In view of the Washington conference on the limitation of armaments (to be precise in our terms as well as limited in our hopes) and on the Far Eastern problems, it may not be untimely to signal these works. They present an epitome of general knowledge on the two countries,—their history, present political situation, and a large development allotted to art and

¹E. Flammarion, publisher.

²Alcan, publisher.

³G. Crès, publisher.

the spiritual manifestations of the Yellow Race.

In an article on these same books,⁴ Félix Bertaux asks for a better study of what might be called "intellectual geography". What he says of a tendency of some French minds since the war to shut themselves up into isolation and thus drift into further misunderstanding of foreign mentalities, is true also of other peoples. Great and progressive nations have shown, since 1919, a marked laziness and non-curiosity concerning the inner life of each other, the deep motives underlying political events and accidents; what we need is not more superficial information but some methodical and intelligent knowledge. "To study the Englishman, the German, the Russian from within", says M. Bertaux, "would be far more useful than to indulge in those inquiries by reporters who hurry between two trains, getting statements which they misinterpret, or describing a country by the number of factories, armories, and bathtubs it possesses."

It is not only a question of piling up data (although that is better than the other excess, that of know-nothingism). A few recent works show a hopeful tendency in actually explaining the spirit of races and nations to each other, and therefore dissipating such distrust and misrepresentation as survive even material and analytical knowledge. Hovelacque's "Chine" and "Japon" are among these works.

More twin books. After "Les Idées de Charles Maurras", here is "La Vie de Maurice Barrès" by Albert Thibaudet, who is one of the best equipped scholars of the generation neither "old" nor "young". There is not much use in criticizing here this criti-

cism and presenting this presentation of Maurras and Barrès, the two great conservative leaders in French contemporary thought and politics. Let us only recommend these books as being most thorough, honest, complete, and yet sanguine and vivid commentaries. Thibaudet has the advantage of not belonging to the party of the men he portrays, and the merit of not hitching himself to an opposite party. Therefore, and because of the unusual qualities of the author, this double contribution to the intellectual history of modern France is a most valuable one.

PIERRE DE LANUX

⁴La Nouvelle Revue Française, Aug. 1, 1921.

⁵Nouvelle Revue Française, publisher.