

OBITER

THE BEARSTED COLLECTION. Few private collections bear a more personal imprint than the Bearsted collection which was recently exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and assembled mainly by the late Viscount Bearsted. Constantly we were aware of his finely developed aesthetic discrimination allied to his sympathetic view of human affairs. The major European schools are all represented—although it must be admitted that the northern schools triumph throughout.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to dismiss the Italian section without qualification. The early Tintoretto, albeit lacking the spiritual and dramatic cohesion of his mature works, anticipates the later glories in certain details—for instance his very personal response to the plastic and rhythmic beauties of the figure seen from behind. There is too a delightful Giovanni di Paolo of the 'Presentation of the Virgin' where the artist combines naïve directness and a sophisticated pictorial concentration which is characteristic of the finest panels of the Sienese school. El Greco's 'Dispoiling of Christ' dominates the few Spanish acquisitions as the two equestrian portraits by Clouet dominate the French. In the former the original freshness of the pigments has been miraculously preserved so that the figure of Christ is the focal point of the composition not only formally but colouristically through the radiant crimson of his robe. The Clouets also are remarkable for their colour, its reticent yet delicate richness recalls the subtleties of Piero's Montefeltro diptych. By his poetic touch and vision in 'The Haymakers; late afternoon', the English Stubbs gently reconciles Man and Nature. But ultimately Lord Bearsted was less attracted by the ideal humanity of the South with its platonic overtones than by the eccentric, synthetic and particularized vision of the Flemish painters, the Expressionist German realism of a Wolgemuth, the sensuous brilliance of a Metsu. In the superb 'Tired Traveller', Jan Steen evinces a technical control and modest chromatic harmony akin to Vermeer. Dirk Bouts, Rogier van der Weyden, Hugo van der Goes, Gerard David, and Prevost are all numbered among the Flemish primitives and also those solitary geniuses of the school: Jerome Bosch, Brueghel and Patinir. Indeed, Bosch's 'Seymour Triptych' with its broad, deceptively simple, design and deft precision of the handling in such details as the negro Magi clad in white relieved only by the golden hue of the bird at his wrist, and Brueghel's grisaille of the 'Death of the Virgin' whose flickering chiaroscuro and reserved pathos mysteriously foreshadows the aged Rembrandt, are perhaps the peaks of the collection. M. SHIRLEY