

REVIEWS

which they are treated. The ancient world of Greece and Rome was not engaged in the single pursuit of producing literature : it was engaged in *living* ; and literature is only one of the manifestations of its life. Take up a dialogue of Plato, for example, and see in its very first paragraphs the communal life it presupposes : references to the Palaestra of Taureas, the Porch of King Archon, boxing contests, the games, the religious sacrifices. All these ' everyday things ' made up the life of the times, and they must be realised if the literature is to live again. Their traces are plentiful enough if our attention is directed to the *visible arts* that remain. The Quennells have already made us at home in the daily life of our own English past, and they have now introduced us to the Greeks. How did they spend their day from morning to night? How did they sleep? What were their buildings like? Life inside the house ; cooking ; pottery making, weaving, reading, dancing : life outside the house ; farming, trading, shipping, the games, the theatre, the gods and their temples—all these things interestingly described and illustrated bring that ancient people before us in a human way that cannot fail to stimulate. Very wisely, also, the authors have not been content to treat of ' Classical ' Greece alone, but have gone back to those primitive times out of whose vitality the order of the later period was achieved. It is a pity, however, that they were not able to include more photographs (in preference to drawings) of the art of these primitives—such as that of the magnificent statue in the Metropolitan Museum of New York—art which appeals to us to-day as more creative and profound than many of the polished specimens of the age of Pericles (and later!) whose plaster casts encumber our art galleries. That is the only criticism that suggests itself, and even that seems ungrateful when we reflect on the merits of the book as a whole, packed with information yet no mass-produced encyclopaedia, homely, witty, enlightening.

A.M.

RHYTHMIC FORM IN ART. By Irma A. Richter. (John Lane ; 21/-.)

This book, though marred by looseness of terminology and excessive enthusiasm in the later chapters, in which Miss Richter attempts to apply her geometrical explanation of the classical ideal to representative Renaissance and post-Renaissance paintings, is an interesting contribution to the analytical study of Greek art. While the origin of Miss Richter's admirably argued case may be found in Mr. Jay Hambidge's *Dynamic Symmetry*, her derivative formulae have at least the virtue of simplicity, and the results she has achieved in her effort to

BLACKFRIARS

prove that the chief measurements of six typical black-and red-figured vases in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (one of them the kantharos assigned to the Brygos painter) form part of a stated series of geometric progressions plotted in the form of concentric circles and based on the larger measurement—height when it exceeds breadth and vice versa—are very remarkable indeed. Her examination of the Parthenon is based on a double scale, the first the length of the bottom step (237.44), the second the length of the upper step on the East front (164.00). Thus, taking at random a few of her results, in the major scale half of the radius of circle I (59.36) equals the height of the façade from the upper step of the stylobate to the apex, the radius of circle II (73.37) is the width of the base of the cella, and the radius of circle VIII equals the width of the metope, while, in the minor scale half of the radius of circle I (41.00) is the height of the interior, the diameter of circle II (101.36) is the length of the upper front step, the diameter of circle III (62.64) is the width of the interior, half of the radius of circle VII (2.28) equals the height of the cella platform, and so on.

But then Miss Richter, like the Baconians who consider that Bacon, besides scribbling off Shakespeare's plays, wrote all Marlowe and most of Montaigne, applies the unassailable results of her study of Greek art to twenty-two pictures ranging from Duccio to Cézanne, insisting, on the strength of a Peruzzi drawing in the British Museum, that it was the common practice of all artists to compose on a system of pentagons inscribed inside a similar series of concentric circles in geometric progression. Of her twenty-two examples we can accept with reservation the legitimacy of five, three of them frescoes and one (the Peruzzi drawing) the work of an architect. The fifth (the Traini *St. Thomas Aquinas*) is an anomaly, although, like the proportions of the haloes in the Duccio *Three Marias at the Sepulchre* (Opera del Duomo, Siena), it has a certain affinity with Byzantine work. Before interpreting so categorically the reference in the Codex Gaddiano to 'la vera proportione da Grecj chiamata Simetria' in the light of this single example of Duccio's work, Miss Richter would have done well to consider Vasari's use of a similar phrase in reference to Jacobello and the employment of a circular motif in the ninth century Cypriote mosaic of the Panagia Aggeloktistos at Chiti and even in the sixth century work at Parenzo, which suggest that such proportions, if found in Duccio, so far from proving him a self-conscious geometrician, simply show him reminiscent of what in Byzantine work had been an architectural necessity. Equally, anyone who compares the Lille drawing for Poussin's *Massacre of the*

REVIEWS

Innocents at Chantilly with the final painting must immediately admit that his method involved not the geometrical filling of a given space, but the reduction of a design from human to pictorial terms. With her tabulated principles of composition Miss Richter refuses to recognise that on the introduction of an incommensurable element, colour, into a two-dimensional work of art mathematical distances can count for nothing. Where, however, there is definitely an architectural element in the composition, as in the thrones of the Fra Bartolommeo *Virgin and Saints* (Louvre) or the Bellini *Madonna* (Frari, Venice), which she illustrates, or where the painting itself fulfils an architectural function, as in the Raphael and Masaccio frescoes discussed, it is natural that the proportions should be to some extent dictated by architectural considerations. But to expect Hogarth and Fragonard to observe the limitations imposed on the quattrocento church decorator is surely a little unreasonable.

Neither can we altogether accept the peculiar sense in which the word 'rhythmic' is used throughout the book. The mathematical symmetry advocated by Miss Richter is inherently static and therefore to qualify it with adjectives like 'rhythmic' or Mr. Hambidge's 'dynamic' tends to confuse the issue. From a statement on page 3 it appears that Miss Richter considers time and rhythm synonymous, a purely classical conception quite inapplicable to the Baroque work included in her discussion. Rhythm in painting is no more exclusively dependant on the mathematical division of space than rhythm in music on the mathematical division of time.

Nevertheless, criticism of the latter part of Miss Richter's book should not obscure the breadth of application of her conclusions on classical art and their very great value. These conclusions deserve dispassionate study, if only because they provide those to whom the Elgin Marbles are a *bête noire* with a valid reason for their being so. As Monet put it, 'On ne fait pas des tableaux avec des doctrines.'

J.P.-H.

NEW LOVE-POEMS BY SIR WALTER SCOTT. Edited by Davidson Cook, F.S.A. Scot. (Basil Blackwell; 5/-.)

In working for Professor Grierson at the Victoria and Albert Museum Mr. Davidson Cook made the curious and lucky discovery of a manuscript telling of Scott's first love affair with a girl called 'Jessie.' She was of humble degree, and young 'Wattie,' rising seventeen, met her while staying there with his uncle, Robert Scott. The letters in this book are really more interesting than the love-poems. In one he says, after alluding