



*Designed by Palladio about 1555 for the Foscari family, Malcontenta was decorated within with a marvellous series of frescoes by Veronese, Zelotti, and Battista Franco. Discovered by the present owner beneath layers of whitewash, these masterpieces have not previously been published.*

THE whole of the *piano nobile* is decorated with frescoes executed at the very time when the technique of that difficult medium was at its height. And all were hidden beneath a layer of whitewash until the present owner began gradually to uncover them. Here it is possible to illustrate and describe only the more important in the rooms subsidiary to the *sala*, described last week. In most cases their subjects can be identified by reference to Ridolfi's descriptions, published in 1648.

The frescoes in the room north-east of the *sala*, known as the Prometheus Room, have been beautifully restored by Professor Rafaeldini, who for many years has been busy with work of this kind in the Ducal Palace at Mantua. Even on grey and rainy days, something like a sunny glow seems to fill this room.

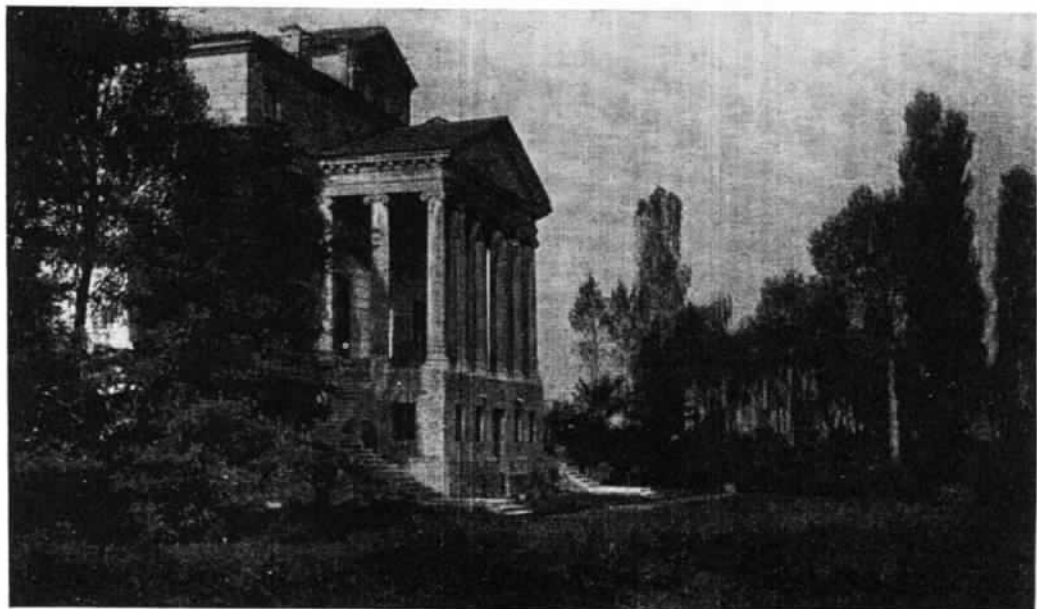
The ceiling represents Prometheus successfully carrying away fire from Olympus for the benefit of suffering humanity unnoticed by the gods, who are feasting. Over the door that opens into the hall (Fig. 2) is Hercules stealing the armour of the sleeping Cacus. In tall, narrow panels between the columns on either side of this door and of the window opposite, panoplies of musical instruments hang by violet ribbons. It will be remembered that at about this time the golden age of European music was beginning with Palestrina.

Over one of the two very large Verona marble chimney-pieces (Fig. 3)—which, though earlier, are very like those that became so popular in England during the reigns of Charles II and William and Mary—is painted a superb seated Juno dressed in gold-coloured draperies. There are pearls and jewels in her auburn hair, and she holds a horn of plenty to her side.

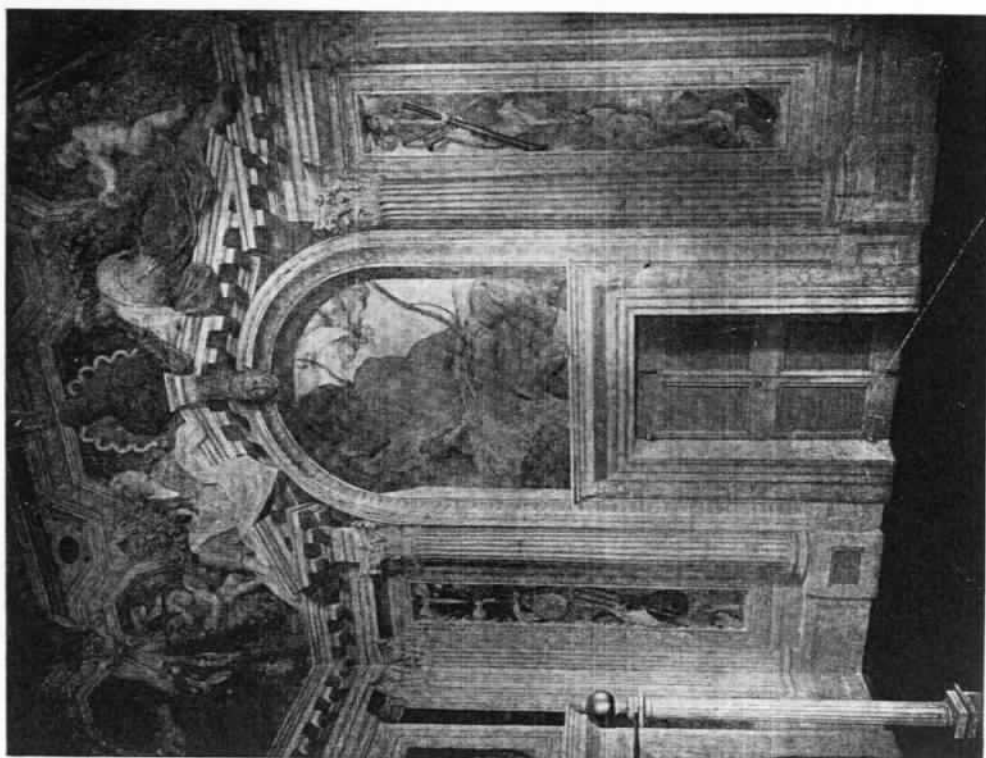
She is here depicted as symbolising prosperity and success of every kind, and has that sort of radiant majesty which Titian and Rubens knew how to give to their women. As is inevitable, and as it should be, cupids hover around her; one of them stands at her knees, while a man, irresistibly attracted, respectfully approaches her in homage.

This scene, like one of figures in a wheatfield in the "Malcontenta Room," is an heroic pastoral in which well dressed figures are represented in a sylvan setting, reminding one of many old Italian novels, and of some of Shakespeare's comedies. Both are so happily conceived that colour, form, and incident are felt to be as inseparable as they are in the works of Rubens. Before such frescoes, be they by Zelotti or by Veronese, the great Flemish painter's debt to his Venetian predecessors is clear.

From inherent stylistic considerations, these frescoes are often ascribed to Paolo Cagliari (Veronese) though there is no contemporary evidence to support this attribution. It is true that Palladio also fails to mention Veronese in connection with the magnificent and better-known ones in the Villa Barbaro (later Giacomelli, to-day Villa Volpi) at Maser, near Treviso. Yet most of the frescoes at Maser have for a very long time been accepted as being without question by Paolo Veronese. However, it is certain that up to the time when this villa was built, and probably later too, Zelotti and Veronese (who had been fellow-students of Badile in Verona) frequently collaborated. A plate in Coronelli's seventeenth-century book, "La Brenta, quasi Borgo della città di Venezia," bears the inscription: *Palazzo Foscari, portento dell'Arte d'Architettura del Palladio e dipinto tutto da Paolo Veronese e Celloti.*



1.—LIKE A PAINTING BY CLAUDE: THE PORTICO OVERLOOKING THE BRENTA



2, 3.—IN THE PROMETHEUS ROOM, SUPERBLY FRESCOED BY ZELOTTI AND PAUL VERONESE  
The chimneypiece foreshadows the familiar English Charles II type. All the other mouldings, columns, entablatures, etc., are painted in *trompe l'oeil*



4.—CEILING OF ONE OF THE CABINETS OF THE "GROTESCHI"



5.—ONE OF THE CABINETS OF THE "GROTESCHI," WITH IDYLIC LANDSCAPES IN THE LUNETTES

It should, moreover, be remembered that, for all these frescoes' maturity of style and absolute mastery of the technique of fresco painting, Zelotti was, in 1560, twenty-eight years old, and Veronese only four years older. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the chief earlier writers on Venetian painting, such as Ridolfi and Zanetti, all agree that Zelotti surpassed Veronese in severity and nobility of style, in the thoroughness of his knowledge of anatomy and, particularly, in the technique of the art of fresco. As all that really matters in the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy is that the works themselves exist, so, if these frescoes are by Zelotti and not by Paolo, it simply means that Zelotti was the peer of Veronese, and a more considerable artist (at least, at this stage of his career) than he is generally given the credit for having been, and that many inferior frescoes that are elsewhere attributed to him may be by other and lesser artists, such as, for example, Fasolo.

It should be remembered, too, that there was at one time not a little discussion to decide which artist painted the very fine "Vision of St. Helena" that is to-day in the National Gallery.

In the Prometheus Room, the architectural framing painted *en trompe l'œil* is of great beauty and may well have been designed by Palladio himself. Had the frescoes at Malcontenta been painted only a very few years later, Renaissance restraint would already have been lost in baroque licence, and these architectural settings would have been more theatrically conceived and coarser in detail. However, the elaborately orchestrated unity of effect that was the aim of baroque art, together with a hint of its lively movement and magniloquence, are already perceptible here and there—pure and serene expression of the ripe Renaissance though these paintings be.

With the help of Mr. Paul Rodocanachi, so justly well known in Paris as an architect and decorator, the present owner has striven, in the furnishing of the house, to be consistent with the architectural character of Palladio's building by refraining from cluttering the rooms with the pretentious walnut and gilt stuff that Italian antique dealers usually sell as *cinquecento* furniture. Under his own and Mr. Rodocanachi's careful direction, he has had the strictly necessary furniture made plainly by local carpenters, striving only to obtain convenience, together with suitable scale and colour, without bothering unduly about "period." The constant aim has been to be comfortable without doing anything to the house that could lessen the effect of its architecture and frescoes.

To the west of the Great Hall, the frescoes of the middle room are still, for the most part, under whitewash. The general scheme, as we know from Ridolfi's book, was designed to give an out-of-door impression. It consists of an airy sort of pavilion with supports that rest on a painted balustrade which forms a skirting or dado to the room. Through a simulated aperture on the ceiling (the whole of the decoration of which is still concealed by whitewash), a beautiful naked figure of Bacchus will some day be revealed, according to Ridolfi, who also tells us that the God of Wine is represented pressing the juice out of a bunch of grapes into a cup that is held by Cupid. When these frescoes are uncovered, Venus, too, will be revealed standing beside the others, "to show that wine often leads to more sensual delights."

It is from this room that "The Concert"—a lovely composition by Zelotti that is to-day in the Verona Museum—was taken, together with other frescoes which were removed by the cruel process known to Italians as *strappi*. This process consists of taking pulls from frescoes by means of canvas that has previously been covered with strong glue. By this means two or three pictures—each one, of course, paler and more imperfect than the last—can be obtained from a single fresco!

On entering the Room of the Giants (Fig. 6), anybody who has been to the Palazzo del Té at

Mantua will inevitably say "Giulio Romano." Yet Vasari, in his *Life of Battista Franco*, wrote that Franco died in 1561 at the age of sixty-three after catching cold from painting on the damp walls of a villa near Venice. In a more precise manner, Palladio, in his description of Malcontenta in the second volume of his "Four Books of Architecture" (first published in 1570), corroborates Vasari by telling us that Battista Franco, "grandissimo disegnatore a nostri tempi," died precisely here after starting to decorate one of the rooms. If only by a process of elimination, we are led to conclude that this was the room, and evidence accumulates in support of the conjecture.

It should be noted that Palladio praises Franco as a *disegnatore* (draughtsman), and, indeed, the mastery of anatomy and knowledge of perspective that he displays in this room is as titanic in style as it is in subject. In spite of this contemporary evidence, Franco's authorship of the greater part of these remarkable frescoes was very soon forgotten, for during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they were attributed to Veronese, to Zelotti, and even to Titian. In much bombastic verse, Boschini, in 1640, praises Zelotti dithyrambically as the creator of these Titans, which he describes with baroque floridness and gusto. The President de Brogues, too, on his way to Venice in 1735, admired them as being by Zelotti, and was so enthusiastic that he stopped to revisit the villa on his return journey. The ceiling, the gilt statue of a woman, and the architectural settings were possibly by Veronese, probably by Zelotti.

In some ways these frescoes—at least, those of them that are by Battista Franco—should perhaps be considered as already belonging to baroque art. They are among the most remarkable paintings in the house. Gigantic forms of Titans are here represented lying prostrate between masses of rock, having been struck down by one of Jupiter's thunderbolts for having had the presumption to revolt against him. This was a thoroughly Italian subject, treated by Battista Franco in a thoroughly Italian way. It was a subject, too, which was peculiarly likely to appeal to the humanistic sympathies of the artists of the later Renaissance, of Michelangelo (who survived Battista Franco by three years), and of such pupils of Raphael's as Giulio Romano (*b.* 1492, *d.* 1549), Daniele da Volterra, Sebastiano del Piombo, Perino del Vaga, and the sculptor Amanati, Franco's life-long intimate friend, by whom there is a colossal statue of Hercules in a garden in Padua.

Franco was a characteristic product of this generation. Filled with admiration for Græco-Roman sculpture, he had been an assiduous pupil and copyist of Michelangelo, whom he hero-worshipped all his life, both in Florence and in Rome.

He had seen Giulio Romano's (to-day long notorious, but then still famous) room at Mantua that is frescoed with the same subject. Naturally, in the treatment of such themes the line between power and bombast, on the right side of which Michelangelo alone ("Michel piu che mortale angel divino," as Ariosto describes him) never failed to remain, is an easy one to overstep. Inevitably Michelangelo's imitators are full of unpleasant swagger and humourless exaggeration, though it is unfair to overlook the far from infrequent patches of true grandeur that are to be found in some of their works.

The room at the Palazzo del Tè is considerably larger than the one at Malcontenta. For that very reason, one would expect this subject to be even more overwhelming here than it is at Mantua. Instead, the contrary is the case. The reasons for this are no doubt many, but one of the most obvious is that, at the Palazzo del Tè, there is no architectural setting, dado, nor framing of any kind to prevent the Titans and huge rocks from giving the beholder a disagreeable sense of oppression, not only from their colossal size, but also from the violent movement that is suggested.

At Malcontenta, Battista Franco had the happy idea (perhaps suggested by Palladio) of contriving a setting of ruined Corinthian architecture to provide at once a foreground, a base, and at least a fragmentary frame to keep his melodramatic vision of struggling giants expiring among hurtling rocks, as it were, outside the room! Moreover, in these frescoes, Franco's more artistic qualities, notably a luminosity that is rare in his work, help to make the dreadful melodrama of the Titans' battle more incidental to the general atmospheric effect; those tortured forms and struggling figures have become first and foremost shapes and colours.

After Franco's death, the vaulted ceiling must have been

painted by either Zelotti or Veronese (or perhaps by both of them in collaboration). Floating in his own glowing radiance, and painted in the pale colours necessary for giving the correct aerial perspective, Jupiter is here represented still brandishing in a rather casual and off-hand manner the thunderbolt that had such dire consequences for the too ambitious Titans. He is surrounded by his whole court of gods and goddesses, who form a solid crown—a sort of living hedge—that separates him from the unpleasant agitation of the Titans. The composition of this room gives the vaulting almost the appearance of a dome. The elegant ruined architectural setting of the world-cataclysm that is depicted on the walls—on which there are already weeds growing (perhaps as a hint of Nature's indifference and prodigality)—is an interesting and extremely early example of those productions with which Pannini, Hubert Robert, and others were later to satisfy the romantic demands of their contemporaries. The three doors, and particularly the solitary tall window, are very happily and ingeniously incorpo-



6.—THE ROOM OF THE GIANTS

The walls are frescoed by Battista Franco with the Overthrow of the Titans by Jupiter

ated into these neo-classical ruins. Over the doors, in shell-like, fluted niches, are painted gilded busts of Roman emperors. This most successful setting was probably not entirely by Franco; it may, indeed, have been almost entirely the work of either Zelotti or of Veronese, as, in the "Calographie du Louvre," there are etchings, described as being after designs by Paolo Veronese, that represent very similar schemes of decoration in which doors are set in ruined architecture, beyond the broken-down walls of which luminous landscapes can be seen. One of these etchings in particular is strikingly similar both in detail and feeling to the frescoes at Malcontenta.

The "Groteschi" cabinets, two small rooms and an ante-room, are vaulted. On an unpainted ground of fine white stucco (of which much is left uncovered by ornament), in clear, clean fresco tints, the walls and ceilings are ornamented with grotesques or arabesques, and with pediments and mouldings *en trompe l'œil*. There are also panels of unrealistically imitated mauve, yellow and white marble, and remarkable landscape lunettes, of which more later. These are framed in dark red bands, decorated with intertwined blue ribbon and green leaves starred with white flowers. There are also four



7.—A DOORWAY IN THE ROOM OF THE GIANTS  
The exquisitely rendered ruined columns frame the melodramatic frescoes



8.—ANOTHER CORNER OF THE ROOM, WHERE TITANS LIE  
CRUSHED BENEATH HUGE ROCKS

sage green medallions containing figures painted *en grisaille*. In all this work, much linear fantasy, delicate invention and taste are displayed. In the centre of each of the two ceilings there is a small oval that is painted to look like the sky. In the one is a figure of Time as a winged old man with an hour-glass and scythe, and—quite in the humanistic spirit of the time—in the companion picture of the corresponding room on the other side of the house is Fame—a very “Paolo Veronese” nude winged figure trailing a pink scarf across a blue sky.

The arabesque decoration in these rooms is nowadays often wrongly called *Pompeiano* by the Italians, *Directoire* by the French, and “Adam” by the English, though ornamentation of this kind had been in general use for centuries before the discovery of either Herculaneum or of Pompeii, from which the Adam Brothers, and later Percier and Fontaine, directly derived their inspiration. The word “arabesque” suggests an Islamic origin, but what is here meant by the term is a style which drew its models from the remains of such ancient Roman decorated buildings as were excavated in and around the Eternal City and near Naples during the fifteenth century and earlier. At the same time as Raphael was engaged on his great series of frescoes in the Vatican, excavations were being made among the ruins of the Palace of Titus. Some large vaulted apartments, with decorations of great beauty and in a marvellous state of preservation, were discovered. These rooms had been buried under building material, and had in the course of time become subterranean, and were therefore called “grottoes” by the Italians. Hence the reason why similar adornments have ever since been known as “grotesques.” Among the artists in whom the most passionate interest was aroused by the finds in which these excavations resulted were, first and foremost, Raphael himself and his Venetian friend Giovanni da Udini, Giorgione’s pupil, the finest painter then living of fruit, flowers, birds and beasts, which he combined with scrollwork into exquisite decorations. Also the wonderfully gifted Perino del Vaga, and Giulio Romano, Raphael’s favourite pupil, whose numerous and varied talents very nearly amounted to genius. All of these artists were gifted with extraordinary facility, inexhaustible invention and sureness of taste—just those gifts, in a word, that exactly fitted them for excelling in work of this kind. In fact, in this *genre* they came to equal and, in the case of Raphael and Giovanni da Udini, in the opinion of many people, even to surpass, the excellence alike of their prototypes of the Roman “grottoes” and of the rich harvest of discoveries that was later to be revealed at Pompeii. It was precisely from this group of Raphael’s pupils that Battista Franco and other Venetians such as Bernardino India received their training. This had stood Battista in good stead during the years between his departure from Rome and his return to Venice, when at Faenza and at Urbino he had been employed in decorating thousands of pieces of pottery with figures and *groteschi*. The arabesque decoration at Malcontenta may have been by Zelotti or by Franco, though it is also not impossible that it was by Veronese or by Bernardino India, who belonged to the same group of artists. At just about this time he was enjoying a great reputation for such work. Very similar decoration which is sometimes attributed to him is to be found in other villas and buildings throughout Venetia.

The fresh and dignified landscapes frescoed in the nine lunettes of the “Groteschi” cabinets are in a formal style that was possibly—even probably—derived from the landscape backgrounds of Titian (who had still fifteen years of life before him when they were being painted). These out-of-door scenes, though they date from nearly twenty years before the birth of Rubens, with their blue distances and their well spaced groups of trees, already announce those conventionally idyllic landscapes, inspired by the bucolic poets, that Poussin and Claude were to bring to perfection a century later. They are representations of virgin nature in a serene Virgilian mood, of which such traces of human work as classical ruins, a rustic bridge, a distant boat, a turbaned pilgrim, a solitary horseman, or pastoral figures in repose, are the almost inevitable complement. The distant Alps—and, more frequently, memories of the Euganean hills—often figure on the horizon. In one of these scenes a

coach can be seen on the far side of a canal hurrying to a nameless but typical little North Italian town from which the usual Venetian *campanile* rises by the side of a temple-like church. In another—perhaps the most important one—there is quite a large town built beside a wide river, in which are several Roman-looking public buildings and a bridge, not unlike Palladio's covered wooden bridge at Bassano, which leads to a building that is very like Malcontenta itself. In the foreground, a couple of trees, whose trunks are elegantly twisted round each other, are flatly and darkly silhouetted against the sky, whose strong effect of light is thereby intensified. Serene and smiling, such scenes are already almost Claudian in mood. With these sylvan landscapes, too, Malcontenta provides another prototype, besides that of its architecture, for much that was to become traditional in subsequent European art, and which, in fact, through Hubert Robert, Corot, Cézanne and Dérain, has lasted on until our own day.

These romantic landscapes, as compared with those of Poussin or of Claude, are perhaps a little superficial in mood; they are, however, no less decorative and urbane, and, thanks to their necessarily rapid execution, have much of the freshness and charm of brilliant improvisations.

#### EPILOGUE

Anyone who, for any length of time, has been privileged to live at Malcontenta, watching through perfectly proportioned windows the passing pageant of the seasons, cannot but learn much from this proud and lovely old building with its friendly though inflexible character. The house, like all such places, is a dream-picture of a way of life—a vision that encourages certain idealistic and aristocratic aspirations that, because they are profoundly human, are as irrepensible as they are unrealisable.

Yet it is not gloomy. On the contrary. Nor is there a dark corner in it. With its elegance and solidity, its spaciousness and compactness, its simplicity and its grandeur, for architects and for their patrons alike Malcontenta is an object lesson in optimism. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that it has been the prototype of so much that was good in subsequent country-house architecture, both in Europe and America.

The decay of any particular building, however slow it may be, is, alas! both certain and inevitable. It can at best only be retarded. Yet, thanks to a great artist's particular genius

for harmonious proportion, as well as to the science and sound craftsmanship with which it is built, a building that is beautiful, even though battered by the centuries, is still a convincing example of the permanence of æsthetic values, of how only beauty is neither fragmentary nor transitory, and of how, in a word, "Beauty is truth, truth Beauty."

What if, romantic and lovely as it is, even to its lovers Malcontenta often appears to be no more than a doomed and useless relic of the past: something like a once-formidable galleon that has for centuries lain, wrecked and abandoned, on a shore from which the sea and its tides have retired for ever? What if, at such times, the only message of this ancient house is *sic transi gloria mundi*? Does not that equally apply to empires and to waves, to religions and to weeds, to all things, in fact, including ourselves? All that matters is that Beauty, miraculous and unique as Life, should have existed. Certain it is that Man's physical and spiritual necessities do not change appreciably in a few centuries. Malcontenta is still as exactly fitted to every essential human need as when it was first built.

Though they are of various shapes and sizes, these vaulted and symmetrically disposed rooms are all of them equally well proportioned. Into them Palladio, with subtle art, divided the great cube that is formed by the villa's weathered outer walls—and one cannot but feel profoundly grateful, not only to the famous architect, but also to the unjustly forgotten Battista Franco and to the almost equally forgotten Zelotti, whose dreams of an ideal world still adhere to this interior, and are as much an integral part of the building as the mother-o'-pearl lining is to a shell. And much as a shell, when it is held to the ear, is full of the sound of the sea, the silence at Malcontenta—which only seems to be accentuated by such interruptions as the Oriental-sounding cries with which the passing bargemen give warning of their approach to the near-by lock—is a silence that is full of echoes of the amazing story of Venice, a story that is largely the history of its famous old families, for whom it was only right and proper for just such dwellings as Malcontenta is, to be built.

With his architecture in general, and with this Foscarini palace in particular, Palladio succeeded in adding yet one more enchantment to Italy, whose present was, already in his day, as full of History as of Art. His genius, as shown at Malcontenta, adds glory even to this country whose very dust is venerable and an inexhaustible source of inspiration. A. C. LANDSBERG.

## EVENING IN THE CHILTERN

By SIR JOHN SQUIRE

Pale in the east the moon wafts high  
By branches carved black at ease,  
Southward a greying evening sky  
Behind a line of windless trees,

And in the west a bar of gold,  
A burning rim that soon must wane;  
While banks of lilac cloud enfold  
A formless sinking ruby stain.

Still the moon brightens, fades the sun  
His evening glow of glory spent;  
The birds go silent one by one. . . .  
That vastness is indifferent.

To us, our longings, hopes and dreams,  
All fevers in the human breast,  
Nor worth a glance of notice deems  
Our Ishmael race that cannot rest.

Above these hills before men came,  
Once washed of old the shifting seas:  
The heavenly pageant was the same,  
The sun, the moon, the skies were these.

Yes, all this evening's vivid gold  
Faded as now to even grey,  
The wide unwitting waters rolled  
Beneath the changeless end of day,

And stars gleamed through the darkening air  
Before there was a human heart  
To solace, but they did not care  
And will not care when men depart.