



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO, who gave up Surrealism, some years ago, to return to conventional painting, made quite a hit addressing the Royal Society of British Artists the other day. He described modern art as a "melancholy dictatorship," said that "the nefarious spirit of modernism has succeeded in penetrating even England," and added, with a fine disregard for plural antecedents, "The sea, which encircles the British Isles, and which defended it from the invasions of all its enemies since the time of William the Conqueror, has not proved to be a sufficient bulwark to bar the way to this subtle enemy."

What interests us here is the amount of venom the renegade can summon up against his former beliefs and associates. If history teaches anything, the next step will be an undercover assignment for de Chirico to put the finger on



modernists, crypto-modernists, fellow-travellers, and dupes; to ferret for heresy in all the pictures on exhibition in London; and, eventually, to make headlines with the charge that the august Royal Society itself has been infiltrated by modern artists engaged in espionage on techniques of underpainting and brown glaze.

SAMUEL BUTLER (the nineteenth-century one) once said that nobody can consider himself a writer unless he can write an epitaph or name a cat. In a roundabout way, we got to speculating, one recent morning, as to how he might have felt about naming a horse. The fact is we were going over the entries at Belmont Park and had learned that

among the horses running were Chalk, Custody, Applause, Hard Facts, Invariant, The Blues, Mossy Face, and Dentifrice. Certainly, we thought, those persons charged with naming race horses have an easy job; anything goes (Anything Goes—scratched). They don't even seem to feel constrained to give the horses names that will inspire confidence in the animals' abilities. Diving Belle, with the rather sinister connotation of the verb "to dive" in sporting circles, was among the entries that sounded dubious to us, and the name Elsewhere seemed an unfortunate name for a horse that one hopes will fetch up at a specified spot at the end of the race. We tried to imagine what would *not* do for a race horse's name, and we made a little test by confining ourself to the objects within immediate view in our small office, which looks like a monk's cell in a business theocracy. Space Bar was the first name; Margin Release (which has a pleasant, if vague, suggestion of speed about it) was the second; then came Letter Paper, Two Carbons, Eraser, The-saurus, Bisodol, and Despair—all, we thought, admissible. A young lady entered and put a dunning letter in our incoming basket. This trivial incident produced Incoming, which we considered a splendid name, and Wire Basket and Internal Revenue, which seemed good. To these we added Jailbait. We don't think any of those names would do credit to a writer trying to name a cat.

In Bloom

IT'S iris time up at Columbia, and we've been on a tour of the campus with Sam F. Trelease, a professor of botany at the university and the man who began to plant irises there, back in the cheerless days of 1931. "The trustees were demanding flowers for Columbia," he told us as he strode from his office, in Schermerhorn Hall, into the

bland afternoon sunlight. "They were really very much stirred up about it. Well, it was a problem. Finally, it occurred to me that the iris is the only flower hardy enough to withstand the frightful urban conditions to which we're all subject here. It's never bothered by disease or pests, and it's in bloom every year at Commencement time. Most convenient. It's also comparatively cheap. Other flowers have to be nursed along under glass, at great expense, before being set out. All the iris asks is well-drained soil and plenty of sun." The Professor pointed to a field of silvery blue off to starboard. "Princess Beatrices," he said. "Their blue is about as close as we can get to the real Columbia blue. Princess Beatrice was hybridized in 1898. There are probably a thousand varieties of iris today, and new ones are developed every year. Anyone who breeds a new one usually names it after a friend, relative, or famous person and registers it with the American Iris Society."

We approached a young man taking a picture of a pretty girl who was stand-



ing behind a bed of irises, some lavender-pink, others deep red and purple, which Professor Trelease said were Sweet Sixteens and George J. Tribolets, respectively. "Her name is Iris," the young man said, and the girl beamed across the nodding flowers. "My parents gave me that name because they liked it," she explained, which, far from exhausting the subject, led her to add wistfully, "Aren't you going to ask me what my favorite flower is?" We did, and it was. "We have some seventy-five varieties of iris on the campus," the Professor said, "all of them the bearded, or German, iris. They can't be crossed