

of modernity, the trained mind has no need of jargon.

The two pictures just mentioned, however, have no scientific interest if science is taken to have its common meaning, and by long tradition successive authors of these reviews have made some attempt, however slight, to discover at least a few works that might be expected to interest those whose training has been in the rigid materialism of the sciences, as well as those whose lot has been cast in the warmer and more generous atmosphere of the humanities. First of all, then, "Embryonic Kitten—grain study in coarse pine" may arouse the curiosity of the botanist and, no doubt, the wrath of the embryologist; but surely none can fail to be amused by "Caterpillar", an ivory statuette of a sphingid larva standing on its 'hind legs'. Indeed, the sculpture this year is noteworthy for the high proportion of animal studies, all more or less stylized and none without a certain charm.

Leaving the flower pieces—fewer in number than usual—on one side, probably one of the most interesting pictures, scientifically, is "Sixteen-year-old Suffolk Stallion" by Sir Alfred Munnings. The old 'Punch', hollow-backed, is seen standing in his stable in such a way that the great depth of the neck at the junction with the body is clearly visible. This feature causes the neck to be more markedly sub-triangular than it is in other heavy breeds and may account for the head appearing to be disproportionately small. Moreover, it suggests inquiry into the history of the Suffolk Punch and makes one hazard a guess that the breed may be descended from the horses painted by Vandyck and others that I discussed on a previous occasion (*Nature*, 158, 695; 1946).

Geologists seldom have an opportunity of seeing how their classical localities appear to a painter, and for that reason, if for no other, "Malham Cove" by Richard Eurich is worthy of consideration; needless to say, it is very well painted, although the heavy cloud-shadow in the top right-hand corner may cause some trouble until it is realized that pictorially it is an essential feature.

Taken as a whole, one would hesitate to describe this year's Royal Academy exhibition as more than mediocre. On the other hand, one would not subscribe to the cynical opinion that every Academy is 'the worst ever'—until the next one comes along. In each room there are up to half a dozen works of high merit, and if here and there it is obvious that the Hanging Committee made an unhappy choice, it should be remembered in extenuation of their shortcoming that more than ten thousand works were submitted for their inspection, and what that means only they can say.

OBITUARY

Mr. Thomas Henry Court

THOMAS HENRY COURT, who died at Harrow on April 19, contributed much to museums and collections of scientific instruments throughout Great Britain. He was a retiring man, known to a comparatively small circle of friends; but his genius for searching out and collecting old instruments, particularly microscopes, has made him an outstanding figure in the development of our knowledge of the history of scientific instruments.

All those who have carefully examined the wonderful collection of instruments on the top floor of the Science Museum at South Kensington must have been struck by the very large number of labels on which is written "Presented by Thomas H. Court, Esq.", and may have wondered who was this most generous benefactor and how could he have amassed, and presented for the benefit of the general public, such a collection of valuable instruments.

Thomas Court had only a brief grammar school education at Ongar, and spent his early years working in various ways, including tailoring and assisting his uncle as an insurance agent. Finally, he joined the piano firm of Brinsmead of Camden Town about 1895, as collector of outstanding payments on the then newly developed hire-purchase system. One day by chance he attended Stevens's Auction Rooms in Covent Garden, and bought a miscellaneous lot which included an old microscope. This he sold at a good profit, and conceived the idea of buying old microscopes and other instruments while on his travels as a debt collector in different parts of the country. He became so interested that he made a thorough study of the subject and gradually acquired a very sound knowledge, especially of the older instruments. He had a marvellous memory and a flair for noticing any special feature of construction. While still employed by Brinsmead, he took some antique microscopes to Mr. Baxendall, of the staff of the Science Museum, who gave him much help on the historical aspect; and it was as a result of this association that Mr. Court arranged to deposit many of his microscopes and other instruments in the Science Museum.

At that period there were few scientific instruments in the Museum, and Mr. Court decided to seek out and assemble a representative collection to be presented to the Science Museum, which he did at intervals from 1911 until 1949, the greatest gift being in 1928; this last donation included many instruments from the famous collection of Sir Frank Crisp. The Crisp collection was sold in 1925, when Mr. Court bought most of the rarer microscopes, including Hooke's own microscope made by Cock, and examples of most of the famous makers such as Marshall, Culpeper, Martin and Adams. In his later years, Mr. Court spent many days at the British Museum tracing dates and particulars of makers from old directories, documents and letters. He was a well-known frequenter of sales and auctions, where he and his daughter bought also many old and valuable books dealing with instruments. As many of these were in Latin, he taught himself sufficient of this language to read them—no small achievement for a man then over sixty. His best-known publication is "The History of the Microscope", written in conjunction with Dr. R. S. Clay; but they also contributed a number of papers to the Royal Microscopical Society. Mrs. Court died in 1930; but he leaves two daughters who are generously carrying out his wish that the Science Museum should receive any further instruments desired from his remaining collection.

Such is the brief account of the life of a man who, starting without scientific training and from a humble beginning, has by his own efforts and farsightedness provided for the benefit of generations to come a collection of scientific instruments which is unsurpassed in the world and which is unique as an illustration of the historical development of the science of optics.