I am convinced that the Louvre would be happy to know that it participates in the reinstallation of the best collections of the Metropolitan Museum. The two great museums are linked by a regular and friendly co-operation, as well as by frequent exchanges of works of art (and even of staff members). Besides, the present celebration is a festival for museums all over the world; it is their way of affirming the victory of civilization over barbarism and of proclaiming faith in the eternal values of the spirit. All those who saw the treasures of the Prado in Geneva in the summer of 1939, before their return to Madrid after the hardships of civil war, experienced this same emotion in the presence of mere pieces of wood and canvas covered with color, so fragile and yet with such invincible life and such secret power. To see them emerge from the shadow is to enjoy the first of the essential fruits of peace.

It was for the World's Fair that the Louvre sent to New York a group of pictures which were chosen to represent several centuries of French painting. Ranging in date from Clouet to Degas, with such painters as Louis Le Nain, Watteau, Chardin, Fragonard, Mme Vigée-Lebrun, David, and Ingres included, this small collection constituted an ensemble complete enough to be shown for its own sake. But when incorporated into any other ensemble of French painting its instructive value may actually increase because of the essential accents which it provides. We witness this now, and we notice how successful the additions are, even in a collection as abundant as that of the Metropolitan Museum, in which no less than six large galleries are required to exhibit the best French pictures.

For some periods of French painting no additions to American collections, even from the Louvre, are necessary. Such a period is that which extends from the time of the Barbizon School to our day. The public and private collections of the United States are here indeed incredibly rich. If a gigantic exhibition of French paintings of those hundred years is ever organized it will undoubtedly be discovered that not even the whole of Europe can stage a better showing of this kind. Thus a single picture by Degas suffices to attest the Louvre's share. And if I dared suggest that a beautiful work could ever be superfluous I would say that Degas's portrait of himself and De Valernes does not bring much into a room in which hangs his large portrait of James Tissot, intense and savory, one of the best that Degas ever painted and of almost the same year. But its melancholy and tender humanity would dominate the richest museum room. It is a moving homage to the intimacy and candor of masculine friendship. The good-natured dandy and the painter himself, with his extraordinary gaze, vague yet obstinate, doubting yet searching, sit side by side in the silence and the softness of a Parisian summer evening.

As far as painting before the middle of the nineteenth century is concerned, the situation is quite different. Here, one may say, any addition of a work of quality is important. But, curiously enough, it is not the earliest French pictures, now so rare, that the Metropolitan Museum lacks. The judicious purchases which followed the memorable Exhibition of French Primitives at Kleinberger's in 1927 and the acquisition of the Friedsam collection in 1931 brought to the Museum an exceptionally large series of portraits of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including several by Corneille de Lyon. In addition they brought a remarkable group of pictures from northern France (the largest any museum can show), with an Annunciation, dated 1451, by an anonymous master who seems here to be revealed as one of the leaders of the school of
Picardy. The sixteenth century is also very well represented by a work which would be an ornament to the Louvre, the charming Birth of Cupid, of the Fontainebleau School, in which a French pupil of Rosso, flattering the taste of the Valois court, reduced the grandiose fantasy of his master to flowers, smiles, and voluptuous shadows.

But the French seventeenth century, still misunderstood in its classical severity as well as in its fascinating baroque realism, is far from showing its true face. Therefore, the Louvre's celebrated masterpiece by Louis Le Nain, the Forge, is particularly welcome on the Museum walls. There is no example which better shows one of the aspects of humanity particularly dear to the French mind. Man appears in the utmost simplicity, caught by the artist in the midst of his daily occupation, much as in contemporary Dutch painting. But he is grave, thoughtful, noble, enveloped in a subdued poetic halo, which one looks for in vain among the peasants of Brouwer or Van Ostade but which one discovers in Chardin, in Corot, in Degas. And as for Poussin, although the Museum shows authentic examples of three principal periods of his work, no one will mind the addition of the majestic Burial of Phocion and more particularly the Rescue of the Young Pyrrhus. The latter is an admirable Poussin, which one suspects is as fresh and virginal beneath its venerable and centenary grime as Jeanne d'Arc was under her armor. To judge by the daring cleaning campaign undertaken by the Louvre quite recently, in 1941 and 1942, it certainly would no longer be considered sacrilegious to pierce this yellow cuirass.

For the eighteenth century, which is more completely represented in the Museum's permanent collections, the Louvre additions are nevertheless important. There is the Judgment of Paris by Watteau. Bodies as firm as ripe fruit alternate with bodies lighter than smoke and witness to the strange fusion of Flemish health and French refinement that nourished the dream of this unique poet. Then there is the famous Grace before Meat by Chardin, full of the "native gravity and native levity of the Frenchman." This is one of those scenes of familiar life relatively scarce in comparison to the painter's still lifes. How much more valuable such pictures will be if it is true that about twenty of the Chardins in the collection of Henri de Rothschild, after surviving the terrific "Blitz" of London, were recently destroyed by an isolated German bomb! There is also the delightful Étude by Fragonard, full of joy, of vitality, and of picturesque wit, one of the rare pictures which impart to rococo painting the quality of great art as well as that of an amazing decorative fancy. Madame Vigée-Lebrun and Her Daughter, by one of the most vigorous brushes ever held in a woman's hand, and the Marquise d'Orvilliers by David show how at the end of the eighteenth century, a period of triumphant femininity, robustness mingled with elegance foreshadowed the virile qualities of romanticism.

The several thousand pictures of the Louvre collection that remained in France wandered a long time on the roads of defeat and are still scattered in hiding in the châteaux of the Loire and of the Midi. At least this is what we wish for them during the impending storm of the liberation campaign. The pictures shown here were far more lucky. They crossed the ocean long before the war, they were sheltered in perfect comfort at Whitemarsh (I am sure this Pennsylvania Versailles made them homesick, just the same), and now they are again on display. When they return to the Louvre, before long, let us hope, they will be greeted by their companions, the war veterans, as veteran ambassadors of the kind who give the most of themselves and do their country honor in the most brilliant international assemblies.

Mr. Sterling was formerly an Assistant Curator in the Department of Paintings of the Louvre, a post he held for eleven years. He left France in 1942 and shortly after his arrival in the United States joined the staff of the Metropolitan Museum.—Editor.
The Funeral of Phocion (above) and the Rescue of the Young Pyrrhus, by Nicolas Poussin (1593-1665)
A Blacksmith at His Forge, by Louis Le Nain (1593-1648)
Grace before Meat, by Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin (1699-1779)
L’Étude, by Jean Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806)
Degas and Évariste de Valernes, by Edgar Degas (1834-1917)