THE MAITLAND F. GRIGGS COLLECTION

No Christmas exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum could be more fitting than that of the collection of Italian paintings recently bequeathed by Maitland F. Griggs, which will remain on view through the winter and spring months. These charming panels of the Florentine and Sienese schools express both singly and as a group the innate interest and appeal of Tuscan painting in the period of its great simplicity. The pictures are the pictures of the faith of Saint Francis and of Dante; they personify the very qualities of emotion and of intellect which still make us look to Italy through the obscurity of our own times and the dark smoke of battle.

As a collector Maitland Griggs was a humanist and an historian. He was a successful lawyer whose almost prodigal generosity to the institutions which he guided was his greatest joy. For his own pleasure and satisfaction he bought the pictures which he could afford in the full knowledge that he was unable to compete with the contemporary Maecenases; so for more than twenty years he devoted himself to the study of a single period. The trecento and the quattrocento were centuries in which he lived and walked and felt thoroughly at home. From his familiarity with their greater as well as with their lesser personalities, it is not surprising, then, that, just as he chose his friends among the living, he chose them in the past for their intrinsic merits and not because he was impressed by the greatness of their names.

He despised the jargon of the art trade and had little use for “expert opinion.” Both in his own painting, in which he was an ardent avocationist, and in his connoisseurship he had a penetrating sense of color which gave to the Griggs collection a homogeneity as refreshing and inspiring as it is rare. In the thirteen pictures which he left to the Metropolitan, and in the larger collections of mediaeval and renaissance objects bequeathed to the Yale University Gallery of Fine Arts, not only is there revealed a flair for quality, but one feels the thoughtfulness and judgment of a man to whom each purchase represented a sacrifice and was, therefore, a matter of real personal conviction. It was this mixture of enthusiasm, sweetness, and sobriety which made him such a good trustee.

Maitland Griggs served on the Board of the Museum from 1935 until his death last July as a member of the Purchasing Committee, where his knowledge of paintings was most valuable, and on the Committee for Greek and Roman Art. His interests extended to many other arts as well. As one of the principal benefactors of the Yale Gallery of Fine Arts and as a trustee of the Frick Collection, he brought to the several boards and committees upon which he served the same quiet strength and judgment.

With the wisdom of many years’ experience in public institutions, he asked in his will that his pictures be shown together only for a year and then be dispersed to take their proper places among the paintings collections of the Museum. Shortly before his death he revoked this request in a codicil and left them to the Museum without restriction of any kind. In recognition of his generous vision the Museum, nevertheless, is presenting them this winter as an entity. This is more than a gesture of gratitude, for we believe that it is important for the public to see and know what one modest layman with taste and knowledge was able to accomplish in a specialized and controversial field.

FRANCIS HENRY TAYLOR
PICTURES IN THE GRIGGS COLLECTION

The Annunciation, from the workshop of Filippo Lippi (about 1406-1469)

The Chess Players, by Francesco di Giorgio (1439-1502)
The Journey of the Magi, by Sassetta (1392-1450)

Saint Catherine before the Emperor Maxentius, by Bernardo Daddi (died between 1349 and 1351)
The Marriage of the Virgin, by Michelino da Besozzo (working 1388-1442)
The Crucifixion, from the workshop of Masolino (1383-1447?)
Saint Anthony of Padua, by Maso di Banco (working 1341-1350)