The current exhibition of Northern Gothic Prints in Gallery A 22 presents great contrasts to last year's print show of the Renaissance. To an eye that has been looking at the Renaissance, the Gothic prints of Germany and the Netherlands express emotion with an abandon that rarely appears in Italy before the baroque. A Schongauer Madonna smiles as tremulously as adolescence. Master ES's lovers are wantoning with a silliness that is almost vicious. The apocalyptic horsemen that Dürer drew in his youth come storming straight out of nightmare. Such pictures could only have been imagined at a time when emotions were fluctuating to extremes forgotten by Western man until this last war and in a land where dreams and visions afforded the only escape from uncontrollable disorders. In Italy the violence and contrast that was mediaeval life found in Dante a layman subtle and strong enough to organize it into the richest known inventory of passions and predicaments. But north of the Alps, where the church monopolized learning, emotional variety was not matched by variety of intellectual interest until the Italianate ideal of the well-balanced human being began to travel and triumph.

The different ideas of man north and south of the Alps partly explain why fifteenth-century prints are more apt to be anonymous in Germany than in Italy. Many Italian prints are either made by known artists like Mantegna, Antonio Pollaiuolo, or Robetta, or are marked by the style of great painters like Filippo Lippi or Botticelli. But in the North few fifteenth-century prints can be attributed to known men. The early Northern single-sheet woodcuts can rarely even be allocated to towns of origin. The occasional signatures, like Casper or Wolfgang, do not indicate identifiable persons and do not tell if Casper or Wolfgang drew, cut, or published the woodcut. Of the remarkable early Northern artists who engraved, most are known only by initials and signs, like FVB, ES, or W with the Housemark, and some have to have designations made up for them, like the vivid Master of the Housebook. Dürer in his youth left scanty and problematical traces but in his maturity came out into a modern daylight of dates and documents, and the same thing happened to his close contemporaries Cranach and Burgkmair. When the Italian idea of the individual migrated across the Alps, it displaced the anonymity of the mediaeval production line. Somewhere about 1500 the Northern artisan began to become the modern artist, just as the mediaeval communicant of the universal Church became the modern citizen who contributes as an individual to the distinction of his national state. The artist's emergence is foreshadowed by Schongauer, who made a name as a painter and signed 115 copperplates with his monogram.

Mass production also tended to make German prints anonymous. Before 1500 Germany probably printed more woodcuts and engrav-
Lovers on a grassy bank. Engraving by Master ES, German, about 1450-1470. Dick Fund, 1922.

ings than any other European country, if one can estimate by today’s scant remains. Her preponderant print production was due not so much to her favorable circumstances as it was to unfavorable conditions in the rest of Europe. The Italian printmaker had to contend with a distaste for printing on the part of connoisseurs, who preferred the drawings, manuscripts, and paintings copiously produced by many highly trained artists. In France the comparative centralization of printing in Paris may have hampered printmaking, which depends on mass sales. France certainly seems to have produced few woodcuts before about 1480, no engraving that can be dated before 1488, and no identifiable engraver before Jean Duvet, who died after 1561, or probably over a century after the death of the first German engraver with a distinctive style. While some of the lesser artists of the Netherlands made prints, the great painters, who set styles for all northern Europe, were busied more profitably by painting for the court of Burgundy and the rich Flemish merchants. Probably no German was as rich as these great art patrons, but thousands of German burghers could afford some printed saints to pin up on the wall above a bed, or a book gay with painted cuts, or a pack of engraved playing cards to while away an hour between closing shop and the vesper bell. The busy towns on the seacoast, on the Rhine, and in the South, buying each other’s books and wood blocks and paper, provided the steady volume of small sales that make printmaking profitable. Thus the bulk of Northern fifteenth-century prints were made by Germans, often working under Netherlandish influence.

Fifteenth-century Germany owed its low es-
tate chiefly to its political disintegration. No invasion had compressed it into a national unity like Spain. No foreigners had moved in to govern without local attachments and pull the country together, as the Normans did in England. The only rulers in a position to regard Germany as a whole were the oddly named Holy Roman Emperors, who bought their elections at the cost of their power. The Emperor had no fixed capital and made up for his dearth of stable revenue from chancery fees whenever princes married or peace treaties shifted the unceasing local squabbles between towns, knights, and princes.

Because the Emperor could not enforce a general peace in Germany, princes ganged together to plunder the towns, which leagued themselves in defense. Local compacts replaced general law and not only made it harder to organize any central authority to supersede them but allowed local principalities to develop a tenacity that has preserved some of them to this day. Since knights were educated by knights and burghers by burghers, it is no wonder that Germany invented the Junker military caste and the Ph.D. specialist. Germany's old political antagonisms still show themselves in the distance that separates the castle on its crag from the tight-walled town without suburbs. In Italy, where nobles lived an urban life, the prince and the beggar saw each other constantly enough to perceive a human being under contrasting clothes. Proximity educated for humanism.

Germany's political anarchy, which made life harder than in many parts of Europe, struck most sharply at men through the caprices of mediaeval law. The mediaeval judge, recognizing the law's inadequacy to represent justice, imposed sentence without too much weighing of mitigating circumstances or too elaborate an enquiry into motives. To save the taxpayer a long imprisonment and to provide a deterring spectacle, the condemned man was promptly led through town in a conspicuous procession and the matter ended—if he was lucky—by his losing his nose or his head. When the culprit was a great personage he was paraded to his doom in his robes of state, to show every man that fortune's wheel can tumble the prince be-
low the beggar. If injustice were done, God would right it all at the Last Judgment. On his brief pilgrimage to eternity man must expect to be the toy of disaster.

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport."

The conditions of everyday life were in general beyond a mediaeval man's control. He could do little to avoid falling sick or to recover his health once he had lost it. When firewood was dear and even rich houses had window glass only in transoms above shutters, he shivered and ached with chilblains all winter. At night he stumbled around his room by glimmering tapers and rarely ventured into the black streets. And woe to him if he came home across the fields toward his walled town after the gates were locked at dusk. Only very recently have we begun to realize how sharply mediaeval man experienced health and sickness, summer and winter, day and night, safety and danger. This winter the Nurembergers know how the Nurembergers of the 1400's rejoiced over a baked ham, a glowing fire, a warm coat. Ruin has brought Europe back to a mediaeval sense of man's helplessness, with this difference, however, that the mediaeval man had a faith in God's justice that let him laugh after weeping.

Years before the war destroyed bricks and mortar, nuclear physics destroyed our reliance on substance itself by exploding the idea of solidity into constellations of energy. Yet we today who see the world as an unstable phase of eternal energy cannot think it any flimsier than mediaeval man, who saw it as the passing shadow of the eternal order. Both ages do violence to common sense by believing in what cannot be touched, seen, heard, or adequately imagined. Both ages have justified their faith by their works, whether they be the cathedral at Chartres, or the explosion at Alma Gordo. In today's age of faith the physicist's distrust of appearances is reflected in an art that discards renaissance naturalism and perspective. By returning to pre-renaissance and "primitive" draughtsmanship, modern art has opened our eyes to mediaeval art and has stripped off the quaintness that obscured it to many people a generation ago. It is largely thanks to the pioneers of the school of Paris that we can respond today without reservation to the last native art of northern Europe, which started to print pictures just before it succumbed once and for all to the dominance of the Mediterranean.