

## BOOK REVIEWS

INDIAN ARTS IN NORTH AMERICA, by George C. Vaillant. Pp. xiii-63. Pls. 96 and colored frontispiece. Harper & Brothers, New York and London, 1939. \$5.00.

The author of this book is a rare and fortunate blend of sound, prosaic "dirt" archaeologist, student of culture history and artist, and possessed, moreover, of a graceful literary style. The result is an admirable work on primitive art north of Mexico. In the relatively few pages of text he gives, in an interesting and instructive manner, a sound and up-to-date sketch of the origin of the American Indian and the development of his varied cultures, stressing especially the development of art and the characteristics of each period and region. The many colotype plates are taken from photographs of the actual objects in many museums, selected for their artistic appeal and to show the outstanding works of art of the various cultures. The plates are full-page, many of the objects shown life-size or larger, and by the best modern art photography. Each plate is accompanied by a page giving full documentation for the object, and for each area there is a short description of the salient features of the art, and a map of the region. Paper, printing and format of high grade approach de luxe quality. A large bibliography, selected with the same care as the plates, and subdivided according to subject and region, aids in making the work as valuable to the anthropologist as to the artist and layman. A concise chronological chart makes the scientific picture clearer.

Both text and plates are divided primarily into two parts, before and after white contact. Such a division is inherent, since the art of the past is of necessity illustrated only by objects in more or less imperishable media: stone, pottery, ivory, shell, bone and metal, while modern or recent art includes also objects of hide, basketry, wood, textiles, sand paintings and modern paintings. Such a division shows up clearly the changes wrought by European contact. Thus, the magnificent art of the southeastern United States, which rates more plates of prehistoric art than any other region, is entirely unrepresented in the post-contact period, while on the other hand no worth-while example of the early art of the tribes of the Great Plains, today probably the most typical of all aboriginal American art styles, has been preserved for us. Dr. Vaillant notes the essential religious basis of all North American art.

As the author remarks, every reader will probably regret the absence of some of his favorite art objects, but as the ninety-six plates had to illustrate all of the many cultures and periods in the many media, a rigid selection was necessary. One notices the absence of modern Eskimo incised art on ivory, and of the painted wooden objects from Key Marco, Florida, in this Museum, which Vaillant terms a "virtually unique case of the discovery of ancient wood-work." To be sure these would have had to be shown from the paintings made of them at the time of discovery, as most of the actual objects have warped beyond esthetic appreciation. One may also regret that Dr. Vaillant decided that photographs in black and white do not do justice to the graceful and colorful beauty of California basketry, and so shows only a few rather indifferent examples.

J. A. M.