

# LONDON LETTER

(continued from previous page)

about seeing sculpture the other way—the premeditated approach, catalogue in hand, the pause to examine deliberately, the flat feeling when there is no response, possibly because the gallery lighting is so even or so dim that there is no strength of shadow.

At Battersea Park we saw Eric Gill's marvellous torso "Mankind" go through remarkable changes from morning light to mid-day sun and pass the late afternoon with sunlight flickering down to her through the leaves of tall trees. The warm honey-coloured stone of Moore's Three Standing Figures seemed immutable in almost any light. And one strange, amusing, but not absurd piece by McWilliam (a Kneeling Figure, having legs and arms and head but no trunk, the upper limbs being supported by an elbow on a knee) would sometimes serve as a kind of spy-glass for watching the swans on the lake, or boys fooling round in a hired dinghy.

How the sculptures needed the sunlight, everyone was saying, and wondering why it had not been obvious before.

And, one could add, how the trees and the lake needed the sculptures!

THE park is on the south side of the Thames, near a huge gasometer and the famous Battersea Power Station, and is also adjacent to one of London's concentrations of poorly-housed, beauty-starved working people. Thus it was possible for Mollie Panter-Downes, the *New Yorker's* English correspondent, to write that Londoners were "pouring across Battersea Bridge" to see the exhibition; but nothing could have been more wrong than her implication that it was attracting no interest from its own immediate neighbours. True, crowds of people from north of the Thames did cross the river where they seldom go otherwise, but they must have been far outnumbered by the homely slummocky women with baskets and sometimes with children over 12 (a shilling each), and the family parties and couples on Sundays, who came inside the enclosure to look about with very obvious pleasure at what was for them a new kind of beauty.

The gate figures were about 150,000 for four months. On sunny days attend-

ances reached 3,000, and on cold days dropped to 500 or so. Some Thames launch proprietors arranged a special service from Westminster pier to take people there.

Like the Edinburgh Festival, the idea has sprung fully grown from birth with such virility that no one can imagine that it could lapse now, and it would be astonishing if it did not become an annual summer pleasure for London. Meanwhile, one permanent benefit is tangible—the Three Standing Figures of Henry Moore.

A representative of the Contemporary Arts Society, speaking at the opening ceremony, sprang a surprise by making public an offer to present the figures to the L.C.C. There were protests at once from persons who abhorred the sculpture, who said (and possibly with some truth at that stage) that the L.C.C. must be embarrassed by the offer.

But the figures have been accepted, and there must be a possibility that they will stand where they are now—on a slope beneath two giant silver poplars, their backs to the lake, and their strange small eyes peering up to the sky, seeming to say, "Is it one of ours?"

—A.A.

# BOOKS

## Shepherd King

DAVID THE KING. By Gladys Schmitt. Hamish Hamilton, London.

THE story of David was told a long time ago in the books of Samuel. It is one of the two greatest "novels" in the Old Testament, and many themes have been taken from it by writers and poets. The encounter with Goliath, the sick mind of Saul, the friendship between David and Jonathan, the disappointed love of Michal, the feud between the rival houses of Israel, the wanderings and escapes of David, the love of Abigail and the amorous intrigues—these are creative springs from which wide-branching streams have been drawn into world literature. Writers who select an episode or a character may turn again to the books of Samuel with some hope of making an imaginative enlargement which can bring the ancient theme into a new relationship with art or history. Gladys Schmitt,



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