

most equally well-known paintings from the Florentine galleries. Such a discovery—and it was one of many—involved an immense amount of work for the specialist officers. They had not only to check the contents of these extemporized treasure houses, some of which had been wholly or partly plundered by the enemy. They had also to make sure that the treasures were in conditions suitable for their conservation. That was not always the case, as when priceless canvases were found stacked against the wine-casks in a damp cellar.

Many of our soldiers had looked forward to seeing the beauties of Italy and had been disappointed. They found buildings and sculptures masked by sand-bags or anti-air-raid walls. They found picture galleries stripped of their contents. Now, with the discovery of these hiding-places, the Monuments and Fine Arts Branch was able to organize picture exhibitions for the army. In Rome forty-eight of the finest canvases of the Italian Renaissance, which had been brought from all over Italy and stored for safety in the Vatican City, were exhibited in the Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini's old office, and for months on end attracted from eight hundred to a thousand visitors a day.

Exhibitions of Siense art at Siena, of Tuscan art at Florence, have given the allied troops an opportunity of seeing such collections of beautiful paintings as have never before been brought together under one roof, and of that opportunity the troops have taken full advantage. Admirable catalogues of the exhibitions, and guide-books to Rome and Florence. Siena, Naples, &c., prepared by the Army, have helped our men to realize the truth of what General Eisenhower said about Italy's contribution to our common inheritance.

Lastly, the monuments and fine arts officers are concerned with the looting of works of art. On the one side their task has been made very easy for them, for the behaviour of our own troops in this respect has been exemplary. But the German State and the gangster leaders of the Nazi party have set out to enrich themselves by the systematic looting of works of art from the conquered countries.

Some they acquired by forced or fraudulent sales; some they simply stole. In one case they failed badly. Near Strasbourg we found the repositories of pictures from Strasbourg and Colmar, including Grunewald's Isenheim alter-piece, one of the most celebrated pictures in the world. The Germans had meant to loot the lot. Some were already packed; in other rooms the empty packing-cases stood beside the paintings: but the allied armies were too quick for them, and the thieves fled empty-handed. But in one way or another great numbers of precious things, including works by the greatest artists, have been carried off into Germany. It is the avowed intention of the Allies that these ill-gotten gains should be disgorged and the pictures and other art treasures restored to their owners. The monuments and fine arts branch collect and substantiate the evidence for these thefts; it is a slow and difficult task, but the charge-sheet already grows long.

I have tried to explain the aims and activities of this new branch of the army. How far has it succeeded in its object? To what extent have the great monuments of the past escaped the ravages of war? Well, there has been, inevitably, a great

