

PLATE XXIII



Janet Stoke

KENNETH CLARK

KENNETH MACKENZIE CLARK

1903–1983

KENNETH CLARK, Lord Clark of Saltwood, OM, CH, FBA, who died on 21 May 1983, had been a Fellow of the British Academy since 1949, the year from which may be dated, as it happens, the start of his really great popular fame. In that year he published his first book on a general theme, *Landscape into Art*, and effectively began a new career which was to culminate in 1969 with the television series *Civilisation*. Thence onwards until his death he was easily the art historian and authority on the visual arts best known to a wide public, both in this country and abroad, notably in the United States.¹

His long life and outwardly flawlessly successful career, along with his accomplished writings and his highly complex character, combine to make him an absorbing study as a personality as well as a significant figure in a particularly British tradition.

Clark was born in Grosvenor Square, London, on 13 July 1903. He was the only child of a very wealthy scion of a Scottish manufacturing family, Kenneth Mackenzie Clark, and Margaret Alice McArthur, a cousin of her husband's on his mother's side. Both families had their origins in Paisley, and intermarriage between them was not uncommon. Clark was very much more than the sum of his parents, but the disparate strains in his nature, which contributed to his complexity, must partly go back to the markedly disparate character of his father and mother.

In adult life, and when writing the first and better volume of his autobiography, Clark was urbanely fair, if not indeed over-indulgent, in his estimate of two people with little in common who seem between them to enshrine all the least attractive aspects of Edwardian society, omitting only the snobbery. Even Clark, however, felt 'very much neglected' as a boy by a mother who never, as far as he could recall, touched him. How Mrs Clark

¹ For this account use has been made of Clark's own two volumes of autobiography, *Another Part of the Wood* (1975) and *The Other Half* (1978), as well as the recent biography, *Kenneth Clark* (1984), by Meryle Secrest, supplemented by obituary notices, especially those by Sir Ernst Gombrich in the *Reports 1981–82 and 1982–83* of the Royal Society of Literature and by Sir Francis Watson in *The Burlington Magazine* (Nov. 1983), and by personal knowledge.

passed her days is unclear, since her near-scandalous neglect of her only child was not caused by any fondness for fashionable circles (apparently she shrank from that manifestation of life as from most others) and still less by any useful, even vaguely philanthropic pursuit. Clark stated that she was naturally intelligent, but no evidence is forthcoming. In her, Quaker heredity, and an upbringing of genteel poverty, had bred a repressed, permanently spinsterish personality, fond of yet utterly unable to manage an outward-going, sporting, 'roaring-boy' husband. His sensational bouts of drinking seem only too easily understandable. It would later prove something of an irony that the very young Clark had already experience—thanks to his mother's ineffectual attitude—of coping with the social and other embarrassments of a compulsive drinker in the family.

If careless and often irresponsible, idle for all his travels and induced activities, Clark's father seems to have been emotionally generous and confident of himself in the very ways his wife was not: 'a dear old boy', in Clark's own words which betray instinctive affection. As well as gambling, shooting, and breeding pedigree stock, the elder Kenneth Clark collected paintings. Among the painters whose work he bought were Millais, Fred Walker and Orchardson. In this urge to collect lay more than the need to cover the walls of a large country house; and though his taste is typical of his period, it was obviously personal as well. His son's first ambition—to be an artist—delighted him. He gave the six- or seven-year-old boy an album of Japanese drawings and commissioned portraits of him from Lavery and Charles Sims (from whom the boy received encouragement to study Degas and first became aware of Cézanne). It was the father who later recommended his son not to spend money in silly ways but to buy 'a nice picture'—something Clark would succeed in doing for himself and also, on occasion, for the nation.

Clark's early childhood was even lonelier than the conventional Edwardian one for a child of his milieu. Yet in certain ways it was far from unhappy or unsuitable, given his nature and abilities. Since he was to prove himself the heir of Ruskin and Pater, it is interesting to compare the three childhoods—all sheltered yet unusual to the point of peculiarity, fostering boys whose innate visual sensitivity was only one indication of their unboyish temperaments in traditional terms. Like Ruskin's, Clark's was a privileged upbringing, materially even more secure, but free from the oppressive moral emphasis that branded Ruskin for life. In uninhibited enjoyment of looking, Clark was closer to Pater but

spared the poverty, early loss of parents and emotional inhibitions that made for so much timidity and unhappiness in Pater's existence.

All three men were to look back, scrutinize and set down something of the circumstances of their childhoods, attempting to trace the springs and stirrings of awareness of their visual responsiveness. For Clark it was an illustrated book of paintings in the Louvre—the Christmas gift of his grandmother when he was seven—that seems to have been a catalyst. In old age he could apparently recall which of the paintings had most appealed to him. He cut out the reproduction of the so-called *Condottiere* by Antonello da Messina, so fond was he of it. Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre* also attracted him, and he was sufficiently sure of his taste to give what must rank as his first lecture, to the audience of his grandmother. Her comment on the painting was at once thoroughly Scottish and thoroughly Victorian, and might have fallen from the lips of Ruskin's mother: 'It's very nude'.

More than Clark probably realized, the gift of this book and his response to it can be claimed as colouring significantly and for ever his approach to art. For one thing, though he was to write on architecture and to deal with sculpture, he was responsive primarily to painting and drawing. And, though more tentatively, for Clark appreciated painters of many schools and periods, in painting it was probably in the end Italian painting of the Renaissance to which he responded most effortlessly and instinctively. He himself referred in his autobiography to his extraordinary confidence where paintings were concerned, as a child but no less as an adult; he was to be far happier in his destiny than Trollope's Louis Trevelyan but like him, and no less obstinately, 'He knew He was Right.' Clark looked at paintings out of sheer pleasure—and that, especially in today's world of art history, is not blame but the highest praise. Yet it meant that he grew up with a strong amateur bias, never really corrected, and took his place as virtually a self-taught art-historian in an age when, even in England, art history was beginning to be treated as a discipline and taught. Nor was it just a question of learning or erudition. Within Clark's lifetime, though only patently perhaps in his late years, the complexity of what constitutes a work of visual art was to be realized more and more, and so also the process of our perceiving it.

If it was Clark's greatest strength that he looked (and could inspire others to look as he did) with a directness and delight that had at bottom something child-like in them, the same gift could also border on weakness when not intellectually supervised and

well buttressed by thought. After all, not every great work of visual art is at first sight immediately pleasurable and accessible. Clark seems to have preferred—with the arguable exception of Cézanne—painters whose work avoids extremes, who are part of some patent tradition, and in whom human and humane values are overt. It might seem unfair to urge too forcibly as evidence of his approach the stimulating and attractively written book *Looking at Pictures* (1960), since those essays grew out of a series of articles not for some learned periodical but for the *Sunday Times*. Yet the overall assumptions there, are almost too confident, too ‘closed’ one might say against other ways of seeing, and other interpretations and approaches. Certainly, the boy gazing at the book of Louvre reproductions in an Edwardian domestic Christmas setting is father to the man who wrote *Looking at Pictures* and who was always to be at his best—it may be claimed—in looking and skilfully evoking what he saw.

Clark’s formal education began at the preparatory school, Wixenford, where apparently more stress was laid on the social distinction of the pupils and their parents than on anything resembling instruction. Predictably, he enjoyed geometry and the drawing lessons (where the art master encouraged him), and some of the out-of-class activities. Most of the boys went on to Eton but he was down for Winchester, for reasons unknown, and went there in the spring of 1917. He was thus again isolated and plunged into a new and far more bewildering world whose harshness and hostility he mitigated in his autobiography. Nevertheless, it was to Eton, not Winchester, that he sent his own two sons. To survive in the school he seems to have adopted, and never quite lost, a demeanour which could manifest itself as coldly arrogant, doubtless to mask emotional and even social insecurity. In the way of almost casual schoolboy cruelty and snobbery, the fact that his father ranked as ‘trade’ was not hidden from him.

By now Clark’s passion for art had carried him beyond drawing to reading Berenson’s books. He was fortunate that the headmaster, Montague Rendall, gave the boys lectures on early Italian art; he also encouraged Clark personally to study photographs that he had assembled under Berenson’s direction. Clark was already a budding collector, able to lend a friend at school drawings by Augustus John to pin up as other boys pinned up family photographs or postcards of actresses; he himself sent home for and pinned up a drawing or two by Beardsley.

Winchester’s classical tradition hardly affected him. He won a prize for a history essay at seventeen, and it seems to have been

this that first shifted his ambitions from becoming an artist to becoming a writer. His career was settled as that of a historian. Having gained a scholarship, he went up to Trinity College, Oxford, to study history but was rapidly disillusioned, possibly by the discipline involved and also by the limited opportunities for his type of writing.

Although on first acquaintance Clark struck many of his undergraduate contemporaries as cold, aloof and arrogant, he was in fact expanding—as generations before and after him—in the intoxicating atmosphere of Oxford. His was the post-war Oxford of the 1920s, the Oxford of Evelyn Waugh (born the same year as Clark) which was to be set in the highly tinted aspic of *Brideshead Revisited*. If Clark appeared vastly sophisticated to some, to others he would probably have seemed rather tame in personality and tastes. But at Oxford he met people who became friends for the rest of their lives, including Maurice Bowra and Colin Anderson. And by going to Oxford he was following, wittingly or not, in the footsteps of Ruskin and Pater. He had also gone to the university with the oldest public museum in the country.

In those days there was no Director of the Ashmolean, but in the Keeper of Western Art, Charles Bell, Clark found an affectionate patron and mentor, as other young men were to do. Four services have been ascribed to Bell in relation to Clark, and they are impressively Pygmalion-like. Bell took Clark to Italy for the first time; he made him work through the entire Raphael and Michelangelo drawings in the Ashmolean; he chose the subject of Clark's first book (*The Gothic Revival*); and he introduced him to Berenson. With all this happening, or anticipated, it seems not surprising that Clark achieved only Second Class Honours in the History school.

By now Clark's goal was the study of art, though his parents dreamt of his having a career as a diplomat. His quiet determination triumphed. Berenson offered him the opportunity of working in Florence, helping on the revision of the *Drawings of the Florentine Painters*, and Clark accepted. He had also to find time to work on his own book, *The Gothic Revival*, first published in 1928. By then his life had subtly altered in several ways.

At Oxford Clark had met and been charmed by a lively, popular but hardly rich girl, also studying history, Jane Martin (actually christened Elizabeth Winifred). Early in 1927 they were married. The contrast in their temperaments was as great as that between his parents, but the result was for long far happier. A true and formidable partnership developed, since Jane Clark adopted

her husband's interests, passionately identified with him and his career, and openly revelled in the opportunities provided by his wealth for stylish living. Her warm, impulsive character must have given the shy, somewhat frigidly withdrawn Clark much greater ease of manner, even if she could not alter his basically reserved nature. And, whatever else was to deteriorate with time, her touching pride in his achievements was patent until virtually the end of her life, nearly forty years later.

No memoir of Clark should fail to try to do some justice to her. Stories abound of her breathtaking assurance and the speed of her assimilation of the circumstances created by the marriage. To a dinner-guest who had murmured of possessing some yellow Sèvres she is said to have coolly responded, 'Yes, but you're rich'. A proposal of Clark's to go into Oxford to look at the books in Blackwell's was dismissed with the counter-proposal, 'Let Blackwell's send the books to you'. Still capable of exerting charm and displaying vitality in late middle-age, and of dressing with the flair for which she had earlier been famous, Jane Clark could be kind as well as candid. 'That's right,' she once told a young museum official rather diffidently disagreeing with Clark over his own lunch-table in the Saltwood Castle days, 'don't let him get away with it.' Equally, she could not contain her delight at Clark's reception at the Royal Academy banquet following the success of the *Civilisation* programmes, though one felt she deeply regretted not having been present when the assembled guests burst into spontaneous applause. By then her adoption of an interest in art had become truly second nature. On one occasion in their late years she and Clark unexpectedly saw in the National Gallery Conservation Department the Ugolino da Nerio panels of the S. Croce altarpiece being cleaned. He asked her if she knew their author, and it was uncanny to see her pause, gradually whittle down the possibilities and then, almost by telepathy, bring out the correct name. 'There you are,' Clark said. It was his turn to display a sort of semi-protective pride. 'Jane always had a good eye.'

It was she, apparently, who stopped Clark from abandoning the manuscript of *The Gothic Revival*; she definitely read and typed it for him, and continued to read and comment on his writing before it was printed. The book was published in the same year that the Clarks' first child, Alan, was born (twins, Colin and Colette were born in 1932) and was very well received. Clark's gift as a writer was at once recognized. When it came to republication twenty years later, Clark, with his usual clear-sightedness and

detachment, indicated the book's merits and also its failings. The later chapters were the better and the more personal; when the author reached Ruskin he could afford to relax from the rather dutiful, thesis-like tone of the opening of the book. The subject is interesting enough to deserve greater length and—as Clark again pointed out—markedly lacking in his text is any discussion of actual Gothic Revival buildings. For all his fluency, Clark was not an architectural historian nor by inclination a serious historian of taste.

In working on the revision of Berenson's book, he had begun to study the Leonardo da Vinci drawings in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle. The prospect of making the first catalogue of them allured him far more than assisting Berenson, and he withdrew from the earlier project. Berenson took the withdrawal in good part, unlike Mrs Berenson, who complained that Clark was, 'ungenerous, self-centred'. But Clark was not born to assist or collaborate, and to centre on himself was a necessary act for someone with his own work to produce.

Clark's absorption in Leonardo resulted not only in the catalogue of the Windsor drawings, his sole work of scholarship of that kind, but in a monograph of the artist, based on lectures, first published in 1939. This often-reprinted book is one of Clark's most satisfactory achievements. The reader quickly senses the author's command of his subject. Behind the easy style and the apt allusion is a firm scaffolding of considerable knowledge. Indeed, in its combination of grace of manner and grasp on material the monograph remains unfortunately a rare example in art history, too little emulated.

It sometimes seems that art historians are temperamentally as well as in other ways attracted to the artists they study. If in the case of Clark and Leonardo there were grave divergences, beginning with dramatically different sexual orientation, yet the suavity, stylishness, aloofness, and elusiveness of the artist found echoes in the personality of his biographer. Clark retained his command of the subject, and one of the best lectures of his late years was that which he gave on the subject of the Mona Lisa, when he went out of his way to characterize Pater's famous description of the painting as 'not only deeply imaginative, but remarkably precise'.

Clark's first post was as Keeper of the Art Department at the Ashmolean, replacing Bell in 1931. It was not, however, this somewhat awkward situation, but a combination of factors (including probably what seemed Clark's transfer of allegiance

to Berenson) that ended their friendship. Clark was now a fast-rising figure. In 1930 he had been involved in the great exhibition of Italian Art at the Royal Academy, to which Italy sent such treasures as Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, and he subsequently edited the exhibition catalogue with Lord Balneil (later the Earl of Crawford), who became a friend and the dedicatee of the Leonardo monograph. Among the paintings in the RA exhibition was Piero di Cosimo's *Forest Fire*, which Clark was instrumental in getting presented to the Ashmolean, through the National Art-Collections Fund. He rehung the collection of paintings, took such then provocative steps as inviting Roger Fry to come and lecture on Cézanne, and saw himself as a museum director in the future. The possibility of his becoming Director of the National Gallery was being aired among his close friends as early as 1932. And in 1934 he succeeded Sir Augustus Daniel at Trafalgar Square.

There was logic behind the appointment, bold though it must have seemed (and still seems), given his youth and comparative inexperience. He was highly talented, confident and, not least, wealthy. He was likely to be no mere functionary therefore, not easily browbeaten or impressed by the airs of Trustees who had reduced one of his predecessors to a state of nervous breakdown.

Clark quickly established excellent relations with his Board, especially with the Chairman, Sir Philip Sassoon. His appointment had been welcomed in the press and he had sensitive, fresh ideas about presentation of the Collection. Cleaning of the paintings was part of his innovatory programme, as was the setting up of a scientific laboratory and a Publications Department. His own strongest concerns probably lay in exercising his taste through hanging of paintings (something he had first enjoyed as a boy and was always fascinated by) and, of course, through acquisition of them. And here, it may be, very great wealth led paradoxically to the occasional temptation of the bargain. Or perhaps Quaker ancestry jibbed at 'high' prices; that seems the most likely explanation for Clark's strange attitude in 1970 when Velazquez's *Juan de Pareja* fetched over £2 million pounds at auction and he publicly declared the sum excessive for the nation to pay to keep this supreme portrait in the country. (That his own Turner should fetch £7 million pounds at auction after his death may be less ironic than it seems, as he liked paintings he sold to obtain good sums.)

As Director of the National Gallery Clark may have chanced his connoisseur's eye a little too assertively on occasion—as a famous

incident was to show. Yet he is to be credited with acquisition of the Gallery's sole Bosch, the exquisite Giovanni di Paolo predella panels of the life of St John the Baptist, the Sassetta panels of St Francis from the high altar-piece of S. Francesco at Sansepolcro, Ingres's late masterpiece, *Madame Moitessier*, and Rubens's *Watering Place*—to name only a few of the more outstanding purchases during his directorship.

Even one of his bargains may prove to have been exactly that—a painting of St Cecilia, possibly an early work by Pietro da Cortona. If so, it would help in a rather puzzling area of Clark's inactivity. He later recorded that even before becoming Director he had shared the growing re-appreciation of the Italian *seicento*. It is therefore the more odd that he did so little to strengthen the nucleus of that school generously provided by the early Victorians. There were opportunities to buy paintings by Guercino, for example; and yet even now the Gallery has only two works by the painter, one bequeathed in 1831 and the other purchased in 1917. That Clark scarcely bothered with the *settecento* is less surprising. In an incautious generalization he was subsequently to stigmatize the eighteenth century as 'that winter of the imagination', thus freezing out Watteau, Gainsborough, and Tiepolo. By the time of *Civilisation* he had made some seasonal adjustments and found himself being a little more discriminating.

It was deep interest rather than indifference that led to Clark's most notorious blunder in the area of acquisitions. He espoused the cause of the Gallery's buying for some £14,000 (roughly twice its annual purchase grant at the period) four small Venetian panels whose price reflected an assumption of their very close association with Giorgione. Opposition of the strongest kind by his curatorial staff (some of whom were young scholars destined for great distinction) seems merely to have confirmed Clark in his views. To one curator, though not an expert in the field, who protested at the impending purchase, Clark replied, 'Perhaps you are deaf to that particular music.' The paintings were bought, mainly out of Gallery funds. They were *not*, as Clark unaccountably stated in his autobiography, 'presented' by the National Art-Collections Fund. The Fund gave a contribution towards the purchase, as the printed records make plain. The paintings are now catalogued and labelled as 'Ascribed to Andrea Previtali', whose name had been proposed as the author at the time of consideration and was publicly put forward by G. M. Richter in 1938, a year after their purchase.

Much criticism of Clark arose as a result, not all of it perhaps

untainted by personal motives. To the media a mistake of this kind is naturally far more appealing at any time than purchase of a great work of art, and Clark's steady success story, socially as well as professionally, may well have excited envy. What today seems the most remarkable aspect of the story is less Clark's enthusiasm for the paintings than his reaction to his staff; and it cannot be said that time has vindicated his deliberately high-handed challenge to their expertise. It is no wonder, if this characterized his attitude to them, that they in turn adopted a tone resentful if not openly rebellious. None of those involved, including Clark himself, seems to have come through unscathed. He clearly had the greatest difficulty in leading a team, and his assumption of scholarly omniscience was badly misplaced. Long after he had left the Gallery, these matters rankled on both sides. He paid off some scores, with less than his usual detachment, in his autobiography. In the Gallery his name was frowned on for well over a decade and even his arrival in the offices—rare enough—made anyone impressionable, while personally flattered, feel oddly disloyal to the institution.

When the Second World War came, Clark oversaw the evacuation of the Collection to Wales. He warmly responded from the first to Dame Myra Hess's concept of concerts in the empty building. They helped to keep alive an idea of culture which must have affected and encouraged thousands of people. Film and photographs of the crowds attracted to the Gallery at a time of appalling stress are now deeply moving, and it is not impossible that Clark's eyes were then opened to the power of art, in its widest sense, over supposedly ordinary people. Before the war ended, he had—against the advice of his staff—devised the idea of the 'Picture of the Month', a single great work brought up for exhibition from Wales, symbolizing something of what the Gallery stood for.

His own life also was changed by the war. He remained in London and took temporary posts at the Ministry of Information, with varying degrees of success. At the end of the war he resigned the Directorship quite suddenly, leaving for his successor the problems, but also the achievements, involved in getting the whole Collection back and on display at Trafalgar Square.

Clark never again held a comparable post. In future he was to be the Chairman of this or that, a Trustee or the equivalent on numerous bodies, including the British Museum, and always in demand in such roles, as well as as a lecturer, while increasingly he felt his own true vocation was the more solitary one of

being a writer. He valued his independence—and seems to have understood that he was not fitted by nature to be part of an organization, calmly declaring how little loyalty he ever felt after he had left one.

He had been knighted before the war and had also been made Surveyor of the King's Pictures. His wide interests and his wealth, and possibly the social status he had achieved, led towards another role, as patron of living artists, among them the young Henry Moore and Graham Sutherland. When it came to direct commissions, the results seem seldom to have been judged entirely happy—by either artist or patron—but Clark generously gave financial support to several painters. In less tangible ways too, he must have aided their careers; and he is known to have been helpful to those who felt misfits in the Forces. He remained faithful to the artistic figures who had become his friends and was not very favourably inclined to later twentieth-century art, in Britain or elsewhere, though he was impressed at first encounter with the work of Jackson Pollock.

A year after leaving the National Gallery, Clark was elected Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, thus stepping metaphorically on to the podium first occupied by Ruskin. In retrospect this must loom as of far greater significance than the next steps in his career as such: Chairmanship of the Arts Council in 1953 and, less expectedly, Chairmanship of the new Independent Television Authority in the following year.

Clark's lectures at Oxford created interest and excitement—in a university that had continued not to recognize art history as a proper academic study—which may, without hyperbole, be compared to the effect of Ruskin's. Urbanelly delivered, without any obvious actorish effects, but effortlessly stimulating and suavely eloquent, these lectures remain memorable, even down to conduct of the lecturer's pointer and the urbane procession of the slides. When in dealing with Giorgione's *Castelfranco Madonna*, Clark paused to indicate the sole area of the painting that could be trustworthily assessed as not repainted or damaged—the brocade hanging from the throne—a positive *frisson* went through the crowded room. This, in its cool way, was 'theatre', and the lecturer knew it.

From his first course of lectures came *Landscape into Art*. Perhaps the success of this was to be overshadowed by *The Nude*, but at the time of its first publication it seemed one of the most accomplished art books published for many years, graceful and literate and addressed, like the lectures, to an intelligent though not

necessarily knowledgeable audience. So accomplished is it that its leaps and gaps, and disdainful admissions ('I have been constrained . . . to leave out a few painters whose names occupy the labours of historians but who do not seem to have added anything to the imaginative experiences of mankind') pass unnoticed by the hypnotized reader. In sober fact, the book is far too oriented towards Britain (indeed, England). The treatment, such as it is, of German landscape painters tends to be inept; all we learn of Caspar David Friedrich is that he was surpassed by Samuel Palmer. Believing that it was impossible to have 'naturalistic' painting in the eighteenth century, Clark was able to skim past every obstacle to his belief. It is a pity that his visits to Windsor Castle never led him to look at the gouaches by Marco Ricci in the Royal Library.

But what Clark did convey was the spell cast by visual works of art. Without preaching, and mercifully without pages of formal analysis or abstract speculation, he made them come to life and seem to matter. When every criticism is voiced of *Landscape into Art* (and considerable they would be, despite the author's disclaimer that the book was no treatise on the subject), there remain a myriad brief yet brilliant sparks that truly illuminate Bellini, for instance, or Monet and Renoir at Argenteuil. With an apt range of allusion, from Petrarch to Ruskin via Wordsworth, Clark may start from an amateur stance but he gives it a high professional gloss, seeing parallels, making connections, surveying centuries, with an aplomb that foreshadows his later approach. Synthesis is his aim; however heavy the sacrifices and the casualties, he achieves it. Never as hysterically dogmatic and didactic as Ruskin, but never as narrowly reliant on intuition as Pater, Clark sailed triumphantly on, better equipped with learning than either, to take his place beside them.

The reception of *Landscape into Art* must have confirmed the nature of his real gifts. He could inspire people to care for art by the way he spoke and wrote; he had the knack of making difficult topics seem easily assimilable, but he was not a theoretician, nor strictly a thinker. Where he would always be at his best—he certainly came to realize—was in direct relaxed appreciation of the work itself. It all amounted to a gift that cried out to be exploited, in no pejorative way, by television.

What Clark next produced was, unusually for him, a book not based on lectures, a monograph on *Piero della Francesca* (first published, 1951). It was the first book on the artist in English, and the subject was admirably suited to bring out all

his sympathies. Italy and the Mediterranean world, lucidity, harmony, and 'classicism' were the large ideas, allied to a comparatively small artistic *œuvre* and few serious problems of attribution. The result was Clark at his finest, limpid and acute, and writing with beautifully controlled eloquence when it came to *The Resurrection at Sansepolcro*.

For several years he had thought of the nude in art as a subject for a book. It was this theme that he chose when invited to give the Mellon Lectures at Washington. *The Nude* (first published, 1956) is by general consent the best of his general books. The material surveyed is far vaster than that of *Landscape into Art*, better organized and more subtly examined. His excellent opening chapter, defining the distinction between 'The Naked and the Nude', allowed Clark to range from *The Rokeby Venus* to photography and Japanese *ukiyo*e and contrast the body seen through Greek and Gothic eyes. Perhaps the book is least satisfactory in dealing with the Northern, that is non-Mediterranean, nude (in a rather awkward chapter, awkwardly entitled 'The Alternative Convention'), but Clark's handling of classical sculpture is vivid and illuminating—and a good example of how freshly he could look at a conventionally neglected aspect of art.

After the success of this book there came a distinct pause in his major works. Not until 1966, with publication of *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance*, did he tackle another ambitious theme. He was in demand as speaker and lecturer as much as ever, and also characteristically both enjoyed and deplored playing host in the setting of Saltwood Castle in Kent, which he had bought in 1953. There, for a period at least, Lady Clark delighted in being chatelaine, while Clark himself often preferred to spend the week in London, going down only at weekends. At first to intimates, and then more widely, there were apparent acute strains in the marriage, which scarcely, however, marred the calm façade Clark presented to the public. The castle and 'K'—as his friends, following Jane, called him—may raise too patently Kafkaesque associations, but the reality was less of a nightmare, despite the high social tone set by battlements and a narrow entrance gateway, in which, it was rumoured, had stuck the car containing the Archbishop of Canterbury. Showing and being shown the battlements became a standard gambit, and at a given point the visitor learnt that Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh had there contemplated performing *Macbeth*.

With a collection of art objects that included a small bronze that could conceivably be attributed to Donatello and watercolours

uncontestedly by Cézanne—amid maiolica, other bronzes, ivories, porcelain, and drawings—the atmosphere might sound too unkindly like *Private Eye*'s idea of the home-life of Clark. In reality, at Saltwood or in London, he could be a simple, genial, humorous host, never imposing anything as vulgar as his fame and genuinely interested in talking to one or two guests of no particular importance. Yet those not his equals in age, and far removed in reputation, might wonder, as did apparently his close friends also, to what extent they could feel they knew him, even in conversational terms. Each meeting seemed, to some, to have to start from the beginning again. Rapport was something of an uncertain quality, never to be assumed, still less guaranteed. A moment might for no apparent reason turn the temperature from warm to chill. If all this added to the fascination he exerted, it also created a certain tension. Clark was full of surprises, sometimes disconcerting one by an odd blank in his knowledge or by the earnestness of his commendation of some rich American woman, say, as a person of the very greatest taste and erudition. His lack of social ease was often commented on, but he could prove wonderfully adept at dealing with a familiarly gushing admirer, only afterwards revealing he had no idea of her identity, while his aplomb was unforgettably illustrated as in evening dress he imperturbably crossed the floor amid violent 'strobe' lighting and deafening noise on a visit to a New York sixties sensation, 'The Electric Circus'.

Clark liked many aspects of the USA and was popular there even before the success of *Civilisation*. He inaugurated the series of Wrightsman Lectures in New York with a theme that brought together in a fresh way two of his greatest interests, *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance*, published in book form in 1966. Rembrandt had been a very early enthusiasm, and Clark was admirably qualified to relate him, in considerable detail, to the art of a period which he himself knew so well. Perhaps the theme, for all its relevance and fascination, did not quite stretch to six lectures, at least when printed; and amid much praise on publication, the book was also noted by some reviewers as suggesting here and there a rather Victorian view of Rembrandt.

With hindsight, it seems inevitable that Clark's particular combination of gifts, especially his powers of synthesis, should find its fullest expression in an ambitiously conceived series of television programmes surveying a vast topic. In fact, it is now known that behind the scenes *Civilisation*—its very title an almost insolent challenge—got off to an uncertain start, personally if

not technically. As a piece of traditional show-business mythology, that only enhances the eventual colossal success of the programmes—deserved success, it must be agreed, in visual and musical terms, quite apart from the scripts and the writer-performer. As usual, Clark was discriminating in his assessment of his own contribution, as is plain in the Foreword he gave to the published scripts, itself an interesting exposé of his mind. ‘I cannot distinguish’, he wrote, ‘between thought and feeling.’ For anyone who seeks to trace his mental biography, that short sentence will probably provide a significant key.

On the page, as Clark knew well, the scripts have been robbed of visual and especially aural glamour, and it would be wrong to treat them as a concise history of their subject. However, the sheer flow, the vivid yet never obtrusive phraseology and the command of such wide, diverse material must stir general admiration and especially that of anyone who has ever tried dipping a toe into the deep waters where Clark swam with nereid-like ease. To disagree with many of his emphases and his generalizations—to be appalled at omissions like that of Spain (and also Portugal)—and to reject the tacit assumption, barely deflected by the author, that civilization equals Western culture: all these miss the point that the original programmes wonderfully used the medium of television to communicate and to celebrate man’s ability to create works of art in the widest sense. No ‘message’ but a paean is the result; and if the thoughts are rarely profound, what unmistakably fires the whole concept is intense feeling.

After the success of *Civilisation*, Clark, now in his mid-sixties, entered a golden autumnal phase in which honours accumulated richly around him and his name. He was made a life peer. Later he was given the OM, but among so many honours, foreign as well as British, he seems most to have relished being made a Companion of Literature by the Royal Society of Literature. ‘All my life,’ he said at the time, ‘I have hoped to be taken to be a writer, a serious writer . . .’

Of his later books, the most remarkable are the most personal, his two volumes of autobiography. In some ways, it is surprising that he should have attempted this genre, as he openly confessed to lacking any talent (any aptitude, as he put it) for self-analysis. Much the most successful, attractive and convincing aspect of his autobiography is the account of his strange childhood. Like most of those who set out to tell their life story, he found it much harder to deal with his adult life, and the tone he adopted of rather lofty irony is often irritating, serving merely as another mask

behind which the real person, with real emotions and real problems, could hide. Hence his recounting of events and his comments on people are at times painful—more painful than he probably realized—in an assumed detachment that frequently reads as condescension.

Before publication of the second volume, *The Other Half*, Jane Clark died. She had been gravely ill for some time, and well before that had been leading a sad, half-confused existence, not devoid of social embarrassment, exacerbated rather than soothed by alcohol. The facts were widely known and were stoically borne by Clark, whose devotion, especially in the last years of her protracted, wearisome illness, was poignant in its steadfastness and patience. He could scarcely tell all the tangled story of their lives together, but he wrote movingly in *The Other Half* of her death.

The last years of his own life were made contented and serene by marriage in 1977 to Nolwen de Janzé Rice, with happy periods spent at her house in Normandy as well as in Kent and London. He continued to write, though more sporadically, and to think over topics for books. Several of his lectures and talks were collected and published as *Moments of Vision* (1982), itself the title he had chosen when giving the Romanes Lecture. A further group of his writings, on subjects which had always been very close to his heart, was published in 1983 as *The Art of Humanism*, but he did not live to see publication. He died after a short illness on 21 May 1983.

Few art historians—few scholars altogether—can expect their death to attract the international coverage Clark's received. In Europe alone, from Zurich to Madrid, via Amsterdam, Rome, and Paris, the newspapers united to convey the event: *Kenneth Clark gestorben . . . falleció el crítico de arte . . . Kunsthistoricus overleden . . . è morto . . . la mort de Kenneth Clark*.

The memorial service held some months later in a fashionable London church seemed, for all its elaboration, to miss the essence of the man. Only at the conclusion, with the unforeseen announcement of his conversion, when dying, to Roman Catholicism, was there a sharp reminder of the elusive, complex personality, leaving as it were one last, unexpected facet to be revealed only posthumously.

A secular celebration of his character and his achievements might be tempted, looking back on his great, deserved yet sometimes resented fame, his distinguished yet often privately vexed life, and the eventual goal of peace he had gained, to call on the lines from *Adonais*:

Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again;
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure.

MICHAEL LEVEY