

Vermeer

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Have you ever heard of Vermeer? Probably not. Neither had I until two years ago this Christmas, when I received a book with that one name on the front. The book was then a gift, but it is now a treasure; for within its covers are reproductions of forty-four of the finest paintings the world has ever seen, the paintings of a man named Vermeer. To look at the cover, one would never dream of the wealth that lies within, for it is certainly not beautiful. It is a large, cloth-bound, comfortable-looking book, with corners bent, and edges ragged from so much use. The title is printed boldly across the front in large brown letters fully three inches high. The book opens easily, and the pages lie flat, giving mute testimony to the fact that it has not been idle. On the first page is written: "Xmas, 1942. Merry Christmas to my dearest daughter—Love, Dad." The next page announces in small, delicate print that

the book was "Printed by Harrison & Sons Ltd., 44-47 St. Martin's Lane, London. Printers to His Majesty the King." Following this is an introductory essay, "Johannes Vermeer of Delft." Next comes the index, and finally, the reproductions themselves. At this point the book ceases to be an inanimate object and takes life. The houses are not just paintings. They are real houses in which people live; the people themselves are real. They live; they breathe; they almost talk. One wishes they could. The wine in the glasses is real; the soft clouds in the sky are real; the water in the canal is wet and cold, and the cobblestone pavements are hard and bumpy. On, on, down through the pages, until finally there are no more. This volume is closed, and there it is—just an ordinary book with a dilapidated old cover, waiting to be opened again and to take the reader back into the world of Johannes Vermeer.