

REXFORD ST. JOHN BOYINGTON: WHO WAS HE?

Since Boyington himself averred that biographical details were quite superfluous, we will eschew the temptation to recapitulate them here. Besides, for most of you reading or listening to these words such a recapitulation would prove utterly unnecessary (for those few whose minds need refreshing, a quick perusal of any of the great biographical compendia will reconfirm for you what you have always truly known). Think of him, then, as that wonderful old professor whose lectures always ended just five seconds before the bell rang; who always wore a wing collar, even to the department picnic; who never removed his jacket in office or classroom, no matter how hot the day; and who never called a student anything but "Mr." or "Miss" until the great day came when his or her doctorate was not only awarded but officially confirmed. Think of him as Voltaire thought of God: "*S'il n'existait pas il faudrait l'inventer.*" But most of all, think of him as the discoverer of Boyington's Principle, informing, as it does, all our work and being, as Hirschberg has so well put it, "a cornerstone to illuminate the ages."

Even so, one cannot help but wonder whether, as he came to have time to reflect - or even at the very moment of discovery - there passed through the mind of that dogged old scholar (who has come to be known as "The Sage of Woking") a vision of what the future was to bring. For there can be no doubt that his restatement of the entire problem (as it appeared some four years later in his now-classic *Reconsiderations*) was to lead to a bifurcation of the traditional concepts long before established by Fletcher and Brangwyn. Certain it is that had he foreseen the present chaos in all its ramifications (one feels in the recent work of men as diverse as Fiorelli and Hirschberg, groping as they seem to be for new guideposts, a common nostalgia for the old pre-Boyingtonian simplicities) he would have been profoundly shocked. We must never forget that this man, whom we revere as a pioneer today, always spoke of "Old Fletcher" with great affection, even calling him (in a letter to *The Times*) "*il miglior fabbro.*"

But we digress. Yet who can mention the name Boyington without triggering that plethora of vastations encapsulated in his great Principle? "*Boyington, l'homme et le principe, c'est la meme chose,*" observed Arnaud-Deschamps in his famous eulogy, and we can only add, in that same Gallic spirit, *C'est vrai, c'est tres, tres vrai!*