

works of art in the **FIRING LINE**

By Sir LEONARD WOOLLEY, in *The Listener* (England), March 1, 1945

A GREAT MANY people have been anxious about the fate of works of art in the battle areas of Europe.

It may be the Parthenon, dominating Athens, the pictures in some Tuscan gallery; a Calvary in a Breton churchyard, a chateau in Normandy, Chartres Cathedral—or a row of old houses in Bruges. They are disturbed to think of the ruin that war may have brought to such beauty. In the midst of war the fighting men have not neglected these things. The Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives branch of the allied armies was planned long in advance and began its work in the early days of the occupation of Sicily. The reason for its creation was given in a general order issued later to all commanders by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. "To-day," wrote General Eisenhower, "we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped, and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization which is ours. We are bound to respect these monuments in so far as war allows."

That is essentially a task for the army. Our soldiers know that they are fighting to maintain the ideals which have been evolved slowly through the ages, ideals whose evolution is illustrated by the monuments of the past. They are not going to be called the vandals of the modern world. They are anxious to protect their own good name, and that, in practice, involves the protection of our common heritage of art.

Of course, there are limits to the protection that can be given. We have to win the war, and nothing must stand in

the way of that. General Eisenhower makes this perfectly clear in the order issued to all his commanders. "If we have to choose," he goes on to say, "between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more, and the building must go."

There are four dangers that threaten the monuments of art. A building may be destroyed in the course of fighting, by bombing or by gun fire, ours or the enemy's. A building may be not destroyed, but so damaged that unless prompt first-aid measures are applied the damage will in the end prove fatal to it, or to its contents. Buildings which have fallen into our hands, whether damaged or intact, may suffer from being used for military purposes; ignorance or carelessness may do irreparable harm. Lastly, there is the danger of wanton damage to monuments and of the looting of the objects of art. To meet these dangers, we have the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Branch, British and American officers selected from the ranks of architects, museum and picture-gallery officials, art historians, and archivists. They are primarily advisers; they are there not to give orders, but to assist in carrying out orders. In every theatre of war the Commander-in-Chief, British or American, has issued a general order laying upon every officer and man of the allied forces the responsibility of respecting historic buildings. The protection of these is therefore a matter of military discipline.

But orders to be effective must be explicit. The soldier, bidden to do something, must be told what he has to