

let him in to the secret of vegetable colouring that did not fade with time. The result is that the vermillions and blues of his canvases are as bright now as when he painted them.

He made pictures of Indian hunters tracking and resting, smoking around camp fires, surrounded by the vastness of the forest wilderness. His Indians are a dignified people doing, as the hippies would say, "their own thing". Yet the artist, whether he knew it or not, portrayed the

of society people gliding through life on their sleighs and even some portraits, including one of his English patron, Lord Elgin. But always his own bent took him back to the Indian and the *Habitant* and to the forest landscapes he loved.

Though his earlier paintings showed Indian figures in a setting of conventional, brownish dress with very little detail, transported to Canada from the dull side of conventional European painting, he gradually learnt to look at the Canadian land-

Several times he painted drinking parties breaking up and society amused itself by spotting well-known figures pictured leaving an inn at daybreak. But although he enjoyed high living, he never forsook the society of *Habitants* and Indians and retained his love of wild places. He was a tireless walker and trekked for days on expeditions, painting and collecting botanical specimens.

After 1862, his health gave way to all this strenuous activity and he developed a weak

KRIEGHOFF EXHIBITION

Canada House Gallery

Trafalgar Square

until April 30

Mon - Fri

9.30 - 5.30

Admission Free

Left

The Ice Cone, at the falls of Montmorency, near Quebec lower Canada, in 1853

Right

Indians and Squaws of lower Canada



beginning of the Indian's downfall. The very tobacco his hunters smoked was the start of a dependence on the white man which has helped to destroy the Indians' traditional way of life.

He liked to paint them in twos or threes, as he must often have met them, walking with a sledge over snow-covered country. Their faces have the inscrutable reserve of their race, but already their appearance is changing: the clothes and blankets they wear and the guns they hunt with are further evidence of dependence on the white man through the rise of new expectations which only whites could meet. It was the start of a trail which led to a situation, when the Indian was no longer free to fend for himself according to his custom but was faced with a choice of living in a reserve or conforming as best he could to the ways of the white man in order to survive.

We can see all this coming in Krieghoff's paintings thanks to his authentic and detailed record of life as he saw it. His preoccupation with people who lived a tough life, near to the earth and fighting for survival, led him away from subjects that could have made him a lot more money in fashionable society. He did paint some elegant pictures

scape and vegetation with seeing eyes. The change coincided more or less with his move to Quebec in 1846. By the time he made his trip to Europe in 1854, taking a collection of his canvases with him, European dealers were incredulous at their brightness. Could maples be as red as that? People in Britain reacted similarly when sent his pictures by friends in Quebec. Thus Krieghoff anticipated the famous Group of Seven, Canadian landscape painters of the early years of this century who took a concerted stand against artistic convention and shocked the art critics by portraying the Canadian landscape boldly as it was and not toned down to look like Europe.

Born in Holland of German parents, Krieghoff was a student in Dusseldorf and began earning his living as a musician. He taught both music and painting to support himself and his family whenever he was short of funds. During his most productive period 1853-62, after a long struggle in relative obscurity, he became accepted in the English upper class society of Quebec and they bought some of his best work, including his pictures of *Habitants* and Indians.

He was a reckless spender and reveller and loved to drink into the small hours.

When he could no longer travel so much in search of new themes, he fell hungrily upon his memories and sketches. He often repeated favourite themes. "Bilking the toll", based on a real incident with some *Habitant* drinking companions in a sleigh when he galloped past the toll keeper instead of paying him, was repeated again and again.

Throughout his career Krieghoff repeated themes, even in his best works. In this final period he took to painting quick "commercial" pictures, often *Habitants'* heads, for a living, while taking his time and pouring all his skill and love of painting into a few major pieces. The snowy "New Years' Day parade" and "J. B. Jolifou, Aubergiste" (yet another scene of revellers departing) are two of his finest paintings, dated 1871 - a year before his death.

Krieghoff's marriage broke up after he went to live in Quebec. By the time he fell ill the woman he lived with after his marriage and called "Frau" had also left him. He went to live with his daughter in Chicago but was homesick for Quebec and had not the heart to paint there. He died in Chicago in 1872 at the age of 57.