COLOUR IN THE PICTURESQUE VILLAGE

By John Piper

When motorists and char-a-banc trippers agree that a village is "one of the prettiest in England," as they often do, how far are they echoing the sentiments of the Picturesque movement of nearly 150 years ago? Are they, really, if unconsciously, judging by an accepted code? How much has the code altered? What are nowadays the accepted conventions and admired requisites? How far can the motorist help us to formulate some new rules for picturesque colour in villages? I believe he can help a great deal. Every guide-book is his spokesman, just as every guide-book owes a debt to Uvedale Price. It is one of the principles that can be agreed upon by every traveller, planter, artist and local inhabitant, because it has years of tradition and precedent behind it.

Colour can make or spoil the prettiness of a village. And it seems clear from tourists' experience, and from consistent guide-book reading that to-day we recognise, or countenance, three distinct types of picturesque colour in groups of buildings.

1. An unvaried, or little-varying, colour throughout the group, that has a close relation to the surroundings.
2. Colours that are highly contrasted in themselves, or one colour (or white) that is in violent contrast with the surroundings.
3. Sentimental painters' colours.

Colours of the first group are found in all those villages built mainly of local materials, of any age. The local materials echo the colour of the surface or geological features of the neighbourhood. Stone, whether sandstone or granite, repeats the colour of neighbouring quarries, tracks and field walls; timber-frame construction with brick or plaster filling in woodland districts echoes the colour of trees and tilled soil; brick and flint buildings in districts where chalk and clay converge, reflect the same light that glances from the flints lying in chalky ploughed fields; and so on. The characteristic feature of this type of picturesque village is that there are no violent colour contrasts with the surroundings; the village looks as if it had grown from the soil. Its beauty springs from the fact that here man's interference with nature is camouflaged from the start, and

East Budleigh, Devonshire, of which a large water colour forms the frontispiece to this issue, is one of the most often visited of pretty villages. It is described in a recent guide-book as "a typical, quaint Devon village, where thatched cottages abound and Tone seems to make the least possible change in its powerful charm." It has the authentic Uvedale Price qualities of landscape, variety, carried levels and signposts. The colour is varied, but there is much strong contrast, and little naturalism, though many of the roofs are bright green with moss. The prevailing colour of cottage walls is pale apricot; there is white interspersed, and a few houses are of brick. The total colour effect is of "that rich, mellow, harmonious kind so much enjoyed by painters."

Southam Priory, Comberaghshire, on the left, has a simpler combination of "painter's" colour. The walls are of colour-washed plaster, the chimneys of unpainted brick, the roofs are of East Anglian pantiles, steeply-pitched—some thatched. The towers of the two churches in one churchyard are a picturesque feature of the village, though in colour of the "harmony with the landscape" kind.

Ystra-faith, Breconshire, below, is a remote village on the moorlands at the head of the Vale of North. In a half light, or on a dull day, the buildings of local dark grey moulded stone with their weathered slate roofs, collected round the stone church, hole very much a part of the landscape itself; had a few whitened walls, and the single approach-coloured wall of the New Inn makes it extremely picturesque in the contrast with nature manner. These details, providing strong accents that serve to jog the eye and memory about the main-made character of the buildings.

At Nessloss St. Cyres, near Exeter (drawing at foot of page) the influence of the sea on the colour, well is combined with the painting, or rather muddling of some cottages in yellow, white and also apricot.