

# LONDON ARGUES ABOUT ART

(by Elizabeth Bowen)

(By courtesy of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom)

THERE may be much in the saying that controversy is the breath of life. Certainly it is a sign of life. In the artistic as in the academic world there is bound to be controversy between specialists—since inevitably the specialists' field is narrow. It is more important when the subject broadens so that the general public may enter. In London this January there appears to be a healthy, vivacious, controversial atmosphere—with regard to painting, writing, the cinema.

Democratic freedom, self-confidence and energy wonderfully unimpaired by war show themselves in the expression

of the controversy is that the average visitor is stimulated into forming his own point of view.

With the film *Caesar and Cleopatra* the Londoner finds himself faced by a different issue. Is a play transferable to the screen?

The British film industry has, it must be recognised, up to lately handicapped itself from the point of view of aesthetic progress by general adherence to the photographed play form. On the other hand, when this restricting form has been broken with, results have been sensational: British genius has been released, and there have come forth masterpieces of the screen such as Noel Coward's *In Which We Serve*.



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of views put forward. Free discussion for instance continues to centre round the Picasso-Matisse Exhibition at the South Kensington Museum, and the merits or demerits of the film *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

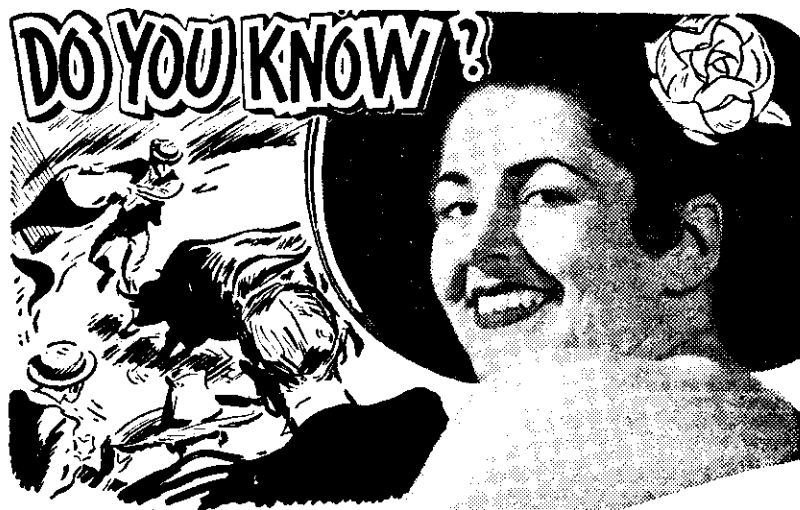
## Official Approval of "Moderns"

The setting (London's second largest public museum) and the sponsoring of the Picasso-Matisse Exhibition would appear to most minds as stamping with official approval two painters till now regarded in England as "avant garde." This great meritorious step forward has in some circles been seen with apprehension. The "Old School," themselves open to charges of academicism, have made this the occasion for an attack on "modernism." The young reply to this attack—not be it said in defence of Matisse and Picasso who cannot be found to require such; but on grounds that these two have ceased to be "moderns"; they are rather accepted masters whose influence has for some time steadily been absorbed. The average visitor to the exhibition probably takes a midway point of view. The advantage

Whatever views are held about *Caesar and Cleopatra*—and it is a centre of controversy—its presentation should serve a good cause.

## Only the "Great"

Again a promise of controversy which should be widespread is given in the Editorial of *Horizon* in the December, 1945 number. *Horizon* is, I think, deservedly the most conspicuous of British literary periodicals. The editor, Cyril Connolly, projects for the forthcoming year a series of articles that are to reassess the reputation of living British writers. Only the acceptedly "great" are to be discussed. Mr. Connolly's aim is not, one gathers, iconoclasm for its own sake: he is rather concerned that at this time—when every kind of value must stand to the challenge—sloth or conventionality should not settle upon our critical powers. In proposing T. S. Eliot, the poet, and E. M. Forster, the novelist, as subjects for two articles, Mr. Connolly does not, I think, suggest that either of these two writers have necessarily anything to fear from examination. He would feel rather that genuine as opposed to conventional admiration should be able to stand the test of fire.



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