

of books. It is written in a seemingly careless, unbuttoned style which avoids precision, accumulates significant detail and seeps through the reader's consciousness by a process so nearly imperceptible it is like the heart's affection itself: when did one first surrender to this person or to that? It is unknowable, but still a fact. Elizabeth Bowen in *Orion II* and in the preface to her *Faber Book of Short Stories* has written more perceptively of the creative processes in fiction than anybody now living, not excluding E. M. Forster. The strong emphasis she places on relevance in story-telling is important in assessing the quality of her own work. By her own standards she is rather precariously successful. The sub-plot of this new novel, the misadventures of Connie and Louie, is tacked on very loosely to the main theme. The main action is never so perfectly integrated that the reader's questions are all answered. Indeed the irresolute handling of the character of Robert—who loves Stella and (quite incredibly) sells his country's secrets to the enemy—is a major blemish.

This is rather ungrateful. *The Heat of the Day* is one of the best novels to appear in England since the war. It marks a new highwater mark for Elizabeth Bowen herself. Her heroine, Stella, with a grown-up son but still attractive enough to be a bone of contention between Robert and Harrison, the caddish sleuth sent to watch his pro-enemy activities, is a magnificent creation. The atmosphere of a family (and that of Robert's family, too, the terrible Kelways) is superbly sketched, and with it a satisfying picture drawn of wartime England with all its small annoyances or privations and large dangers or heroisms.

Elizabeth Bowen writes this novel with a rich carelessness which is the result of immense assurance and which hides but does not diminish her narrative skill. The artlessness is deliberate: few books are so precisely steered to a desired conclusion. She is at the top of her bent. Her next novel may be even more rewarding. The kitten is asleep on my knee, surrendering the field absolutely to Elizabeth Bowen.

—David Hall

DEFENCE OF PAINTING

PARAGONE, by Leonardo da Vinci; introduction and English translation by Irma R. Richter. Oxford University Press, London. English price, 18/.

NOTES for a treatise on painting, by Leonardo da Vinci, were brought together in an edition of the master's literary works. They have now been reprinted in a separate and most handsome volume. According to the editor, *Paragone* (or *Comparison of the Arts*) "foreshadows the beginning of comparative criticism." If this hint can be remembered, some of the opinions may seem less extravagant to readers who are familiar with aesthetics and psychology. Comparisons between the arts were dogmatic in an age when painters and sculptors worked with an almost divine assurance: the theory, like life itself, stayed close to the surface.

Leonardo was quite certain that painting was the highest of the arts (music was only a younger



sister, dependent on hearing, "a sense second to sight"), and he prepared his case with supreme confidence. His notes have the true Renaissance quality; the writing is strong and persuasive, and some of the best passages are full of sunlight. It is impossible to forget, while studying ideas that have been superseded, that we are in touch with a great mind. There are 12 half-tone plates, including a reproduction of *The Last Supper*; and these are arguments so powerful that they make much of the text seem superfluous.

M.H.H.

KIRTLE TO NEW LOOK

THE ART OF ENGLISH COSTUME, by Willett Cunnington; Collins, through the British Council. English price, 16/.

IF they are well written, books by specialists are often of exceptional interest to the general reader. This is such a book. Dr. Cunnington, whose famous collection of English costumes has recently been bought by the City of Manchester, adds to the antiquarian's knowledge the medical man's insight into human nature, and gives an analysis, authoritative and pungent, of the art of English costume, applying to his thesis the canons of criticism which hold in the study of any visual art, treated morally and pictorially.

In costume, says Dr. Cunnington, we study the exposure of the mind by the concealment of the body. Aiming to present the continuity of a living art through six centuries, he discusses the philosophy of dress, emphasising the English genius for compromise. Technically, he reviews such topics as form in costume, the sleeve and the glove, headgear and hair, the principles of colour, textures and materials; philosophically, he discusses the aesthetics of costume, symbolism, mobility and the principles of sex attraction. This original survey is enlivened with gems of pertinent and outspoken contemporary criticism of extreme fashions in the past, and by his own vigorous wit.

The immediate appeal of such a book must depend largely upon the pictorial illustrations. Here the author has been at some pains to choose unusual prints. The coloured plates are very attractive and the arrangement of the other plates in three groups is as convenient as any because each plate is referred to several times in the text. The early illustrations are mainly of portraits or of line drawings and prints of brasses or effigies which, appropriately, are becoming more widely used in historical surveys. Nearer our own time are choice caricatures, cartoons, photographs and fashion plates. These may be consulted for reference or for delight: there are very few family albums which have anything more delicious than the tennis group, 1855 (wearing, the author computes, a stone's weight apiece in clothes—and gloves) or the bathing costume, 1886, "of turquoise blue flannel edged with torchon lace!"

The Art of English Costume is not quick reading (the type, incidentally, is clear) because constant reference to various plates is necessary, but it is always entertaining. Moreover, it rewards the reader by giving him a new

(continued on page 21)

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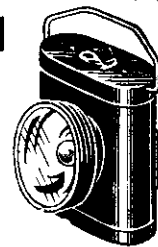
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