

BOOKS

ART FOR EVERYMAN

AN INTRODUCTION TO EUROPEAN PAINTING, by Eric Newton: Longmans Green & Co. English price, 8/6.

ENJOYING PAINTINGS, by A. C. Ward; Phoenix House. English price, 8/6.

THE RAINBOW, by Andrew Shirley; Michael Joseph. English price, 15/-.

ONE HUNDRED MODERN FOREIGN PAINTINGS IN THE TATE GALLERY: Introduction by John Rothenstein. Tate Gallery Trustees-Phoenix House.

VENETIAN PAINTINGS: Introduction by W. G. Constable. Faber Gallery. English price, 8/6.

GAUGUIN: Introduction by Herbert Read. Faber Gallery. English price, 8/6.

PAUL KLEE: Introduction by Douglas Cooper. Penguin Modern Painters. English price, 4/6.

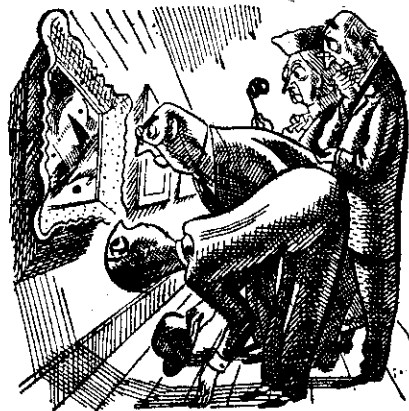
(Reviewed by A. R. D. Fairburn)

THE torrent of new art books continues. I say that without any hint of deprecation, for the general level of quality is astonishingly good, and the treatment is in all cases—or all that I have seen recently—intelligent and useful. Without doubt there must be an intense interest in painting in England at the present time, an almost unprecedented revival, or the publishers would not dare to be so active. I have the impression that poetry, which filled a spiritual vacuum for many people in the 'Thirties, has slumped, and that the same people are now looking to the graphic arts for satisfaction. There is certainly plenty of exciting material to meet the demand.

Eric Newton's book was originally published as a "Pelican." This enlarged and revised edition is probably the best general survey of painting that is available at the present time. Mr. Newton is a scholar, and a critic with a subtle and penetrating intelligence. In this book he sets out to tell the reader what art is about, and what artists have done throughout the ages. Enthusiasm is a little out of fashion, and a reviewer who feels like giving way to it usually looks for some small points of detail to criticise, just to put himself right. I forgo that libation.

When I had read a few pages of Mr. Ward's *Enjoying Paintings* I had the impression, from his description of how the artist is "different" from other people, that he was going to be precious, or indulge in cheap romanticism. The moment passed. And, having finished the book, I asked myself a simple question: "After reading this book, would a novice have any better idea of the tradition of painting?" I found myself having to answer, "Yes, most certainly."

Mr. Ward tells a simpler story than does Mr. Newton, but it is most lucid and comprehensive. It would, I think, be admirable for young students to read. In fact, I venture to say that if anybody who has little or no knowledge of art will go to the trouble (or give himself the pleasure) of reading Mr. Ward's book first, and then Mr. Newton's, he will find himself able to cope with any of



the usual drawing-room arguments about "modern art," or any other sort. Or else he will lose patience with them altogether. Between them these two books cover just about every inch of the ground, and in terms that any sixth-former can easily understand.

The Rainbow is a biographical portrait of John Constable, by one of the most distinguished of living art historians. Constable's life is worth reading about for its own sake, even if one were not particularly interested in his painting. In his way he was as much the English countryman as Cobbett himself. "The sound of water escaping from milldams, willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork—I love such things," he once said. His great landscapes draw their power, not only from his superb technical gift, but also from this deep-seated love of the countryside. Mr. Shirley gives us the full richness of the man and his work. There are many incidental points of interest. Who today would imagine, for instance, that the magnificent painting that gives this book its name was looked upon with suspicion as a revolutionary piece of work—as were many of Constable's later paintings? The thought is salutary, in view of some present day art controversies.

The two additions to the Faber Gallery series are most acceptable. There are some beautiful reproductions in the album of Venetian paintings. The selection of Gauguin's work I find puzzling. Many of his greatest works are omitted. It may be that, with only a limited selection possible, the editors chose those paintings which best illustrated crucial stages in the artist's development. Herbert Read's introduction is the finest short statement of Gauguin's significance that I have yet read.

The big album of Tate Gallery paintings has apparently been in production for some time. The plates are all in monochrome, which is a privation. But there are so many of them, and they are so well-chosen and well-reproduced that one can hardly cavil. This is a most valuable collection. Mr. Rothenstein manages to say a great deal in his fairly brief introduction.

The "Penguin" Klee is not to be missed. It is, I think, on the whole slightly superior to the Faber Gallery book of this painter's work that appeared some time ago, in providing a greater variety of examples. (But both should be on the shelf.) Anybody who can look at this collection of Klee's paintings without finding him quite irresistible surely has a blind spot in his sensibility. Or perhaps he should read the two books at the top of this column.

(continued on next page)

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