

BLACKFRIARS

process they benefit much, both the old principles and the new conclusions.

It is in this felicitous combination of the analytic and the positive that the value of the book lies. Although studies of this and that are multiplied from hour to hour, no one should want to say of this, 'just another hook on art.' And in these days, when most successes come by way of 'stunt' arid 'shock tactics,' it is no mean achievement to produce something new and of value merely by being careful, painstaking and thorough.

R.M.B.

ENJOYING PICTURES. By C. Bell. (Chatto & Windus; 7/6.)

Mr. Bell has always been on the side of the angels: unfortunately they have been the fallen angels. He has seized perfectly the spiritual nature of art, its character as an absolute, and knows how to bait the bourgeois, and still more the 'cultured and academic.' This is very cheerful and refreshing in an age when we are all being so educated as to have no time for ecstasy. Mr. Bell has time for ecstasy, plenty of time, it would seem. And perhaps his leisure is irresponsible for the falseness of his theory. For him this ecstasy which art undoubtedly gives is alone of value: mundane affairs deserve contempt, and moreover he equates the aesthetic ecstasy with the supernatural ecstasy of the saint. His thought lacks suppleness. We can't divide life like that—into stretches of aridity with occasional escapes into delight. To *transform life*, this here-and-now-life—*that is* the function of art, and in an infinitely higher degree, of religion also. Further, one **should** not conclude from an analogy to an identity: the resemblance between aesthetic and religious ecstasy **is** real and striking: the difference is that the latter is salvific, the former not. These reflections come out of Mr. Bell as a result of **an** hour or **two** in the National Gallery and the Vatican. Those who are interested in the development of his thought—and from the aesthetic viewpoint, it has a happy resemblance to the Thomist position as interpreted by Maritain—will find a valuable precision as to the relation between learning, general culture and the aesthetic thrill: while fundamentally distinct from the latter, it may **have** a dispositive effect towards it. Good remarks also on the nonsense that is so common about craftsmanship: the craftsman *as such* is at heart the enemy of the artist and usually a Puritan. Incidental to his reflections Mr. Bell writes some admirable criticisms of pictures, and his remarks on Raphael prove once again that only those who have understood the great modern painters can truly appreciate the greatness and peculiar significance of the Old Masters.

A.M.