

After five years of wandering on the Continent he finally decided to settle down and work for a career. He found employment and relative happiness in Abyssinia, where he traded for twelve years—and here also he smuggled guns in trying to make money. At thirty-seven he came back to France and had to have his leg amputated: his health grew worse and he died the same year. On his deathbed he was converted; and it was thus, in the final surrender of his personal liberty, that ended his lifelong search for a God he had looked for in all the hardest places.

R. S. AUSTEN

COLLECTED POEMS OF ALICE MEYNELL: Centenary Edition. (Hollis and Carter; 12s. 6d.)

Mournful indeed would be the world that had no place for so gentle a visionary as Alice Meynell. Her word-painting is delicate, and her love of nature in all its aspects bears eloquent testimony to a loving nature and a deep tenderness. Her chiselled and polished verses are never ragged and her sense of music enables her to create rhyme schemes that, whilst never obtrusive, are well matched with the ideas she seeks to convey. She is a good painter of youth and age; her innocent eye does not prevent her from seeing all the pathos and tragedy of life. Like all religious people she is profoundly concerned with the problem of pain. She understands the dilemma of the man who cannot reconcile the existence of grief and pain with the conception of a loving and infinitely compassionate God. But she sees that when such a man revolts against the deity and declares 'There are no higher powers: there is no heart in God, no love', his act of rebellion is atoned for by the love that inspires such a reaction. Again, she refuses to yield to the sense of despair the horror of war provokes in her. When she compares the peace of nature with the strife of men, she is inclined to condemn man as ungrateful for the miracle of natural beauty, but she changes her mind when she acknowledges that war, which inspires acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, enables man to attain a stature denied to nature that is quite unique.

Her sense of sorrow and pity is all-embracing. Sometimes her grief is very personal as in the poems 'A Study' and 'A Poet to his Childhood'. She writes in the great tradition of English lyric poetry and is not only willing but even eager to acknowledge her debt to the past. But she is not a mere traditionalist; she is highly original, though she never strives for mere novelty. She casts her thoughts in brief but vivid stanzas which are always keenly inventive and alive.

True tragedy, in her eyes, is not the august sorrow and sublime irony of childbirth and martyrdom and old age and docile mother-

hood, but the blind destruction of sightless forces, 'blind winds', and the melancholy fate of the frustrated and the unfulfilled. Impotent pain, the fear of the ignorant and unenlightened mind. the swift terror of the lark that has no logical explanation, the haunting sense of guilt, agony, in fact, that is 'monstrously disproportionate, and dumb in the poor beast, and wild in the old decorous man, caught, overcome', are fearful enigmas that can alone be solved by the humble submission of man's mind and will to God.

When her mood is most despondent she derives consolation from what she has failed to achieve rather than in the triumphs she has won. Like St Paul, she is only too willing to confess her faults and misdeeds, since their recognition fills her with profound humility and makes her recognise man's dependence upon God and profound need of his mediation. Life is beautiful if dedicated to God, and when she remembers what Christ endured for man and the sublime solitude of Calvary, she shouts triumphantly 'Oh, how divine, divine, divine'.

Her poems are monuments erected in simplicity and inspired by a profound piety. This book, which includes many poems hitherto unpublished, should be especially welcome to lovers of her work because it shows the growth of her talent and still more the moving and constant development of her understanding and imagination. One could not better epitomise the quality of her work than to apply to it the lovely words that she employs in one of her most perfect lyrics, 'oh innocent throat! Oh human ear'. After the self-torture and conscious abstruseness of most modern poets, to read her is like admitting a breath of cool and refreshing air into a close and musty room.

DAVID LUTYENS.

FOUNTAINS ABBEY. By E. K. Ellis. (Cambridge University Press; 1s. 6d.)

Towards the end of his poem Mr Ellis disarms all criticism by saying '. . . the candid mind forbears "To taunt a soaring lark with his descent".'

And particularly because not only the theme but also the rhythm and structure of the poem are of exceptional quality and have earned it the Setonian prize for 1947 it would be presumptuous on the part of a purely subjective reader to attempt to assess it in detail. But because to the subjective reader, against the vital background of rhythm and structure it is the theme of poetry that must make a primary and individual impression, insofar as the vivid merits of Mr Ellis's poem are concerned one is tempted to believe that for the majority, these may be marred by a sense of frustration that