

the theme was not further developed. Perhaps the poet himself anticipates it when he describes his impressions as 'These faint memories of a life half guessed'.

For in the poem, through lines and verses of extraordinary serenity and a searching stillness Mr Ellis conveys the music of past history and of present inspiration. The past history of Fountains Abbey is one of the epic stories of all that was finest in medieval monasticism and in the poet's interpretation there is little weakness.

Like men that rose awe-stricken from the dead

They took the Gospel for their daily bread.

It was from such men that the stones of Fountains took life and harmony.

As kindlings of the spirit clarify

The half-seen vision and the seeing eye

When inspiration moves the hand to draw

These lived and built and patterned what they saw.

And it was part of their achievement that even today the ruins of all they created console a generation whose hunger and anguish for serenity symptomises a veiled supplication to an unacknowledged God.

Yet as the theme of the poem develops into the Fountains of today it appears to dissolve into a descriptiveness of natural beauty which is as mentally moving as it is spiritually passive and acquiescent. Can it be true of the message that such dedicated warriors as the Cistercians laboured to instil that now—

They are at rest—else would their spirits haunt

This ruin still with murmured prayer and chant.

There are, after all, so very many who would interpret the atmosphere and character of the ruined Fountains as little else but the haunted shadow of former inspiration and these cannot fail to regret that Mr Ellis has not taken the opportunity to etch this aspect in a mood less elusive and more compelling.

ANTONELLA LOTHIAN.

ARTHUR QUILLER COUCH: A Biographical Study. By F. Brittain. (Cambridge University Press; 15s.)

It is never easy to know the real man behind a public figure and often enough it is not particularly important. 'Q' however was obviously such a whole person that whether we met the novelist the professor or the politician it was clear that our knowledge could only be completed by discovering the man himself. And this was no easy task. Compared with the vast numbers who must have known his writings few people could ever have known the real Q—his personal friends, neighbours at Fowey and perhaps a few of his students. Mr Brittain's work is therefore of unique value because

he was one of these few. He lived in rooms above Q's at Jesus and, as he says himself, 'my feelings towards him were such that I spent as much time in his company as I could'. So this memoir gives us just that inside view which was necessary to complete the picture of the man 'full of mature wisdom and instinct with humanity'.

At the same time it is not a flimsy tribute to the personal fads of a great man. The solidity and permanence of his work is appraised and in particular his aims and achievements in establishing the English Tripos which he and his successors justly claim to be a true educational discipline with its insistence on the Classical background and the importance of the Moralists and its belief that 'Literature is not a mere science to be studied; but an art to be practised'. Q's work in all its branches will live both because of his own wholeness and because of the deep roots which he thrust down. He may not have found it necessary to face certain problems—that was not the business of his age. He was a pioneer and he laid his foundations deep and solid. Mr Brittain has shown us where this depth and solidity found their source. The book is excellently produced, with portraits, photographs and facsimiles, and only one regrettable misplacement of a Greek aspirate. Both the author and his publishers have earned our gratitude.

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FEARFUL SYMMETRY: A Study of William Blake. By Northrop Frye. (Cumberlege; Princeton University Press; 25s.)

This study of Blake's relation to English literature is assuredly safe from being classed with 'the obsolete, the eccentric and the merely trivial'. It covers its ground with a thoroughness and objectivity that will preserve it from obsolescence; eccentricity is a relative character, its meaning depending on the particular centre in view, but the study is no more eccentric than the poet, and the poet is shown as writing in a solid mythopoeic tradition; the themes the poet dealt with keep any serious account of his teachings from triviality. Teaching is not perhaps what one first looks for in a poet or a pictorial artist, but Blake thought that every genuine artist was a prophet and vice versa. 'If in the Bible poetry, prophecy and divine inspiration are the same thing, and if in Classical poetry they are almost the same thing, is it not a possible inference that any poetry, even one's own, may be prophetic and divinely inspired? . . . All these movements of thought we have been tracing converge on Blake's identification of the artist's genius with the Holy Spirit.' Those are Mr Frye's words, not Blake's, but Blake would by no means have shrunk from an argument based on such formal identifications of things formally distinct, where his theories of knowledge,