

speculations, for the reader to keep up with them. Yet this book should not be dismissed without trying—though some clear thinking will be needed—to understand its argument. And even if, after all, we can only suspend judgment, we have at least been presented with a detective problem of baffling but fascinating complexity; moreover, in a field where the professional scholars can only shake their heads and pedantically murmur 'we do not know', it is refreshing to see the amateurs bravely plunging in with a new and exciting explanation of the mystery of Shakespeare's hidden years.

G. V. SPEIGHT

ST GEORGE FOR ETHIOPIA. By Beatrice Playne. (Constable; 45s.)

Very little of either the contents or significance of this book is conveyed by its title. It falls into two parts; 149 pages are from a travel diary kept in Ethiopia after the end of the last war, there is a short chapter on Ethiopian rock churches and a long and very stimulating one on Ethiopian paintings.

The travel diary is vivid and very detailed. It conveys very perfectly both the character of rural life in modern Ethiopia and the character of the authoress. From it she appears as one of the most appealing examples of that uniquely English type, the Woman Traveller, completely unselfconscious, instantaneously able to get on easy terms with those she meets, quick-eyed and observant, with a zest for adventure and a very matter-of-fact disregard for physical risk.

Since Miss Playne was travelling in search of wall-paintings and panels, her diary forms an ideal prelude to her short study of Ethiopian art. Her conclusions here are re-enforced by admirably chosen illustrations—six colour plates, eight photographs and sixteen drawings. Perhaps only those who have already studied the subject will realize the originality of Miss Playne's approach, the extent of fresh ground that she has broken and the importance of her personal discoveries.

For my part I hold that Miss Playne has over-estimated the extent of seventeenth-century Western influence on Ethiopian painting; this is primarily due to her reliance on the unproved hypothesis of Monneret de Villard that the dominant convention of the Mother and the Child is derived from the Madonna of St Luke in Santa Maria Maggiore. The detailed resemblances in the two types are too close to be due to coincidence, but they could also be explained by a common source in a twelfth-century Byzantine variant of the 'Panaghia Hodi-gitria'. I believe that she underestimates the Byzantine influences that came seeping through the Ethiopian monastery in Jerusalem between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. I do not think she has sufficiently taken into account the north Syrian origins of Ethiopian monasticism

in her study of the sources of Ethiopian iconography. It was a misfortune that she had no time to study the Gondar area adequately or to visit the shrines on the islands of Lake Tana. Yet even if all this were admitted, Miss Playne has made a fresh and original and important contribution both to the history of painting and to the study of Christian iconography. It is to be hoped for the sake of both that she will be given the opportunity to complete her work in Ethiopia.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THOMAS HARDY: A critical biography. By Evelyn Hardy. (The Hogarth Press; 25s.)

An odd thing, possibly the oddest thing about nineteenth-century creative literature in Western Europe, is that from 1814, when Sir Walter Scott followed *The Lady of the Lake* with *Waverley*, to 1908, when the third part of *The Dynasts* was published, only two of the great English novelists have been poets as well.

The titan Goethe, looming in the background of the English mind, in 1809 followed *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, a novel which ploughed the furrows where the seeds of *The Waves* were sown, with the first part of *Faust*, and it is possible that this swing of the master from prose to verse may have influenced Scott in making a like change of medium. Victor Hugo, whose *Feuilles d'Automne* was published in the year of Goethe's death, must have been aware of this dichotomy in the works of the two greatest writers of his day, and it is not fantastic to suppose an impulse to foster a like ambidextrous gift stimulating the egoism of the precocious French boy. That George Meredith, who was at school in Germany about the time of Goethe's death, should have, earlier, begun to express himself in prose and verse is natural enough; but there is no such adventitious explanation of the two forms in which the genius of Thomas Hardy found its highly individual expression.

Hardy and Meredith have been called the demi-gods of the nineteenth-century novel: the twentieth century has been willing to give each of them an equal title as poet, naming them together because of this idiosyncrasy which separates them from Tennyson and Browning on one side and Dickens and Thackeray on the other in the gallery of literature.

The mystery of this likeness between two such markedly unlike writers has not been touched on by Miss Evelyn Hardy in her monograph. Meredith's name appears in her pages, sometimes as one among others at a London party and once as a rather condescending anonymous critic of the younger man's MS. novel. Later on, Miss Hardy, admitting that Hardy's country people do not come to life, adds