

CHASING AN ANCIENT GREEK. By Douglas Young. (Hollis & Carter; 12s. 6d.)

When Mr Douglas told the man in the Piccadilly travel office that the many-coloured booklet of tickets he was receiving would take him on a chase over Europe after manuscripts of an ancient Greek poet, the travel agent remarked that this was a bit different from the usual clients—'Paris via Dieppe: third class return'. He was right; but then Mr Douglas Young is a bit different from the ordinary traveller. The tall Scot (six and a half feet) is an outstanding poet, scholar and Scottish Nationalist with a distinguished reputation in his native land and beyond. His cosmopolitan attitude to life and letters recalls the great Scots of the eighteenth century. His conversational gifts, his witty comments, would have gained him high repute in the salons of a by-gone Edinburgh. One could wish for no more agreeable guide than he, who so resembles in many ways the young Hilaire Belloc, in a leisurely tour of Europe.

Towards the end of the chase, Mr Young wonders if his wife will not be thinking that the chase after Greek manuscripts was only a specious pretext for a pleasure jaunt. It was a good pretext, anyhow, and the chase was in the end successful. The manuscripts of Theognis, a distinguished but now neglected poet of Megara, born in 540 B.C., are scattered throughout the libraries of Europe. This involved visits to Oxford, where Mr Young had spent four years of scholarly exile in its 'Latin Quarter', to Paris with its literary society recalling the days of Mme de Staël, to Brussels, the university cities of Holland, to Berlin and elsewhere in Germany, to Italy and its artistic riches.

Theognis has been neglected for centuries. The pace of the chase is leisurely. There is time for political digressions, for observations of the limitations of the Act of Union in relation to contemporary Scottish affairs. There is time, too, for a lively account of last year's International P.E.N. Congress at Venice, and for many other interesting matters. In the end Theognis is tracked down. *Finis coronat opus*, and we are given samples of his work. It has been a delightful and rewarding chase.

K.M.

THE SEQUENCE OF ENGLISH MEDIEVAL ART. By Walter Oakeshott. (Faber & Faber; 35s.)

English medieval painting, which is the subject of this beautifully illustrated book, has suffered far more than that of the southern European countries from the damage of time as well as of vandalism. It is only from the reconstructive skill of men like Professor Tristram that any idea of the earlier wall paintings can be gathered. But the

manuscripts remain an unparalleled treasure of an unbroken line of artists from Anglo-Saxon times. From these sources Mr Oakeshott has been able to reconstruct the sequence and to illustrate his thesis with over fifty plates—some coloured—which reproduce eighty-seven illuminations from 650 to 1450 A.D. The latter date has been chosen as the point of conversion from pattern and symbol to the naturalistic technique of the renaissance; and within this period the author distinguishes the age of innocence and the age of learning—for the revival of learning in the twelfth century is reflected too in English art. It is interesting to watch the development of this, which we may surely be permitted to call the 'pure' art of symbol, from the solemn and intricate patterns of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon beginnings to the light-hearted choreography of the figures surrounding the tenth and eleventh century script and then on into the new symmetry and far greater realism introduced by the scholastic revival. 'The pinnacle of achievement' in English art is reached in the twelfth century when the formal rhythm of the Byzantine influence combines with the new learning to reveal the spiritual realities underlying at once the Scriptures and current events. Thus a variety of nationalities and temperaments in parents and ancestors begets a unique child of great and subtle beauty.

The student will find that the scholarship of the appendices and notes on the plates greatly assist the general contours described in the text and represented in the excellent illustrations.

C.P.

RIVER DIARY. By Dorothea Eastwood. (Wingate; 12s. 6d.)

*River Diary* is not a topographical and historical account of a fascinating stream, the Usk, but just what the title says: a diary from May to November kept by a poet, painter and botanist who, with her husband and young son, camped in a fishing-hut at Trostrey pool, some way below the now non-existent 'Clytha Arms', already so familiar to the Blackfriars boys at Llanarth.

A diary is necessarily a personal thing; yet some readers (and not male readers only) will feel that the book is in spots rather too subjective, playful and allusive: and it is surprising to read such nonsense as 'the unsmiling gaze of her mysterious Celtic eyes' from a writer of Mrs Eastwood's quality. But her own eyes don't miss anything, whether things, persons or circumstances, and she conveys what she sees with a skill and precision that does not often fail like that. And her interests are not 'selective'—hills and dingles, trees and water, flowers, birds, beasts, insects, fishes, and humans. Yet she seems at times a little aloof with humans: it is significant that at a sheep-auction she should long for Sotheby's and its expensive dealings in *objets d'art*, even if only 'for the moment'.