

concerned with the fiction, most of the good things are to be found in the pieces given to the plays (Barbara Hardy's essay excepted). Perhaps this

has more to do with the very concreteness and directness of the theatrical works themselves than with the deficiencies of the critics?

BRIAN WICKER

**EVELYN WAUGH: a Biography, by Christopher Sykes. Collins, London, 1975, 455 pp. £5.50.**

Evelyn Waugh has been very fortunate in his biographer. Ever since his *Four Studies in Loyalty* Christopher Sykes has been known for his gift of concise vivid portrayal; not only Evelyn Waugh but his whole small world are brought alive. Among the miniature portraits some are very felicitous, like those of Robert Byron and Professor Whittemore; only one seems to me unjust, that of Brian Howard.

Evelyn Waugh's first marriage collapsed in September 1929. A year later he became a Catholic after a month's instruction. Christopher Sykes first met him in 1930. From then on he writes convincingly from a close personal knowledge. All the later Waugh is here with his Faith, his bitterness and his disillusion. These are not qualities that would have been there before 1930. It is difficult to believe that *Decline and Fall* and *Handful of Dust* are by the same author. Nancy Mitford has described the 'He Evelyn' and the 'She Evelyn' of the first marriage being happy together 'like two small boys'.

It is tenable that the collapse of the first marriage was a central cataclysm in Evelyn Waugh's life. Later generations can learn what he was really like since 1930 from reading Christopher Sykes. No one will ever know what he was like when he was writing *Decline and Fall* or producing his film *The Scarlet Woman*. His own autobiography never comes alive and his diaries are obviously unreliable except as a guide to his fantasies.

This admirably illustrated volume is more than a biography; it is also a sensitive and perceptive study in literary criticism. It is a convincing assessment, though I regret the author states that Mr Samgrass in *Brideshead* was drawn from Maurice Bowra; it is true that this was asserted by Evelyn himself but that was only one of his 'Maurice teases'. There was no point of resemblance. If Mr Samgrass had an original it was Professor Woodward. But this is a trivial criticism with which to end a tribute to a remarkable achievement.

GERVASE MATHEW OP

**TEACH US TO PRAY, by André Louf. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1974, 112 pp. £1.25.**

André Louf, Abbot of the Trappist monastery of Katsberg in France, offers us a book on prayer that has the immediate attraction of being prayerful, springing from the silence of the author's own personal appropriation of the contemplative tradition. But this is a wonderfully fresh book, not an esoteric work geared to a purely monastic readership.

Louf has explicitly in mind all those who feel a longing to pray, but are aware of their inability to do so, those who have got nowhere with conventional books of oral prayers but nevertheless are searching for some 'way in' to contemplation. He presupposes that all the time the Spirit is praying within such people; his book attempts to lead them to a gradual break-through

to this 'deeper level of (each man's) interior being', and to conscious awareness of themselves as praying in union with Christ. He does not pretend the way will be easy; there are down-to-earth pages on distractions, temptations and spiritual aridity (e.g., pp. 74-7). He proposes no 'method' or specific techniques. One must learn simply to open the whole self to God and wait in silence on Him, to 'hang extravagantly about the Lord without being distracted'. Affective prayer is not helped by incessant verbalising and conceptualising but it still needs to be fed: the rich assortment of Scriptural and Traditional citations in this book, with Louf's comments upon them, may well help to fulfil this need.

I was particularly struck by the