

Editorial

THIS number focusses attention on Yeats: not because of any Irish situation of the present — however sensible the poet's sadness may seem when he wrote of violence and lack of comprehension or even accurate knowledge in the twenties — but because interest in his writing continues to grow. The discoveries to be made about his intellectual sources are probably diminishing; his interest in the supernatural has been given much attention by scholars and critics; the close study of his manuscripts has followed the admirable work which led to the *Variorum* Editions of his poems and his plays; the late Professor Cross and Mr Dunlop produced a guide to the vast and ever ramifying writing about him. What more is there to say?

Readers will find some answers to this query in this issue. Some redressing of balances and a new view of the two professors who influenced Yeats is given us by Professor Maurice Elliott — and this may turn some readers' attention to Dowden, probably rarely read today and yet at times a most stimulating critic. Yeats was much influenced by his friends, and Mr D. J. Huxley draws our attention to that impish, gifted man Gogarty, whose cavalier poems are far too little known today.

Again the effect of Yeats's association with the theatre needs fuller exploration and Mr Tomlinson deals with his relationship with Gordon Craig. Dr Austin Clarke throws light upon Yeats's earlier career, as do Mrs Fullwood, Professor Richard Londraville and Professor Milne. Yeats's prose, richly textured and full of originality, is explored by Mr Augustine Martin. An annotated edition of the prose would be welcome. Indeed a truly definitive edition of all of Yeats's writing is needed.

Definitive editions raise problems for both editors and publishers. In Yeats's case there are scholars who would wish to see, no doubt, each poem accompanied by its antecedent MS. versions. But this would place the edition out of the reach of most readers and even of many libraries. Do we, in any case, need to bury a great poet's work under such a vast slab of his own rejections? Is the place for them not in the scholarly journals? Or in critical studies? The studies of the growth of individual

poems made by various scholars from drafts to published versions (the *Variorum* Editions show the complex history of the poems and plays in print) are indeed of absorbing interest, in that they show the poet at work, refining, polishing, seeking — if not always discovering — a better word or order of words. The lines in ‘Adam’s Curse’ often surprise those readers who have never attempted to write poetry, or those who smugly think they have achieved poetry when they have crammed some words down, without any thought of their being shaped into memorable lines. No doubt these poetasters are sincere and true to some impulsive desire for self-expression but they lack the modesty and humility to make the line, that has taken hours it may be, seem a moment’s thought, the spontaneity of lasting art. Inevitably much in the manuscripts is impressive. In the endlessly varying drafts of ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ we find such lines as these:

I therefore travel towards Byzantium
 Among these sun-browned pleasant mariners
 Another dozen days and we shall come
 Under the jetty and the marble stairs

or again

Carry me toward that great Byzantium
 And ageless beauty where age is living
 Where nothing changes singing to the oars
 That I may look in St Sophia’s Dome
 On Phidias’ marble or a marble stairs
 On mirroring water where a glint
 On gold limbed saints & Emperors
 After the mirroring waters and the foam
 Where the dark drowsy fins a moment rise
 Of fish that carry souls to Paradise

Most impressive is the poet’s energy, his desire to get the right word in the right place, his sense of discipline which rejected this material, which tautened the final poem, and gave it its classical concentration, its poise in the midst of turbulence. The complexity of the manuscripts matches the complexity of their maker, and he, seeking always to know what lay beyond the temporality of our life on earth, nevertheless sought to reflect

. . . all that man is.
 All mere complexities
 The fury and the mire of human veins.

A.N.J.