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W. F. H. NICOLAISEN

B. OTHER NOTES

Book Review

The Gude and Godlie Ballatis, selected and edited by Iain Ross. 70 pp. 5s.

John Knox: Historie of the Reformation in Scotland. Selected and edited by Ralph S. Walker. 72 pp. 5s. Saltire Society Classics, 1940. Oliver and Boyd.

The place of Scottish history and literature in the curriculum of our schools is not altogether happy. For good reasons (quite apart from Scottish Education Department circulars) Scottish history is treated as a sub-department of British history and Scottish literature as a sub-department of English. A snippet or two of the Scottish Chaucerians perhaps, Burns and Scott certainly, figure: there is time for little more.

Even the teacher who would like to improve on this in the genial weeks after the Leaving Certificate examinations has been hampered in the past by the dearth of suitable texts. To remedy this deficiency, and also to encourage the common

reader who seeks guidance in territory which is hardly known to any but the specialist, the Saltire Society has published, and again reprinted, a series of little handbooks. They contain selections from standard authors, with short informative introductions, and where necessary glossaries. They are simply but attractively produced and, in the best Scottish tradition, they represent good value for a modest outlay.

The two volumes noted here spring from the stormy tides of the Reformation. *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* ran through edition after edition until its Lutheran flavour became distasteful to the strongly Calvinist Presbyterians and to the Episcopalians alike. This well-balanced selection illustrates the various kinds of material in the *Ballatis*, from the fine metrical version of the Credo through the Psalms of David to the songs "changit out of prophane ballatis in godlie sangis for auoydance of sin and harlatric". Although these texts may provoke curious speculation on the part of students of Revivalist hymns or barrack-room ditties, one doubts whether the common reader will wish to go much beyond this selection, and indeed some dozen or so of the poems.

Knox's *Historie* is another story. The passionate arguments, the fierce invective against theological or political enemies, and the whole-heartedness of the man's writing—whatever one may think of his doctrine—are bound to engage the attention. Knox was a master of the swiftly sketched scene. "The Gray Freirs gaiped, the Black Freirs blew, and the Preistis panted and fled, and happie was he that first gat the Hous." Every reader who is led on from that, and similar, passages to Professor Dickinson's admirable edition for the scholar, has justified the production of the Saltire Society Classics.

STEWART F. SANDERSON