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B. OTHER NOTES

Book Reviews

Shetland Life under Earl Patrick. By Gordon Donaldson. Edinburgh, 1958. Oliver and Boyd. 149 pp. 15s.

Dr. Donaldson describes Shetland life about three hundred and fifty years ago with many interpolations as to modern conditions and some comparisons with Iceland, the Færoes and Norway. Unfortunately the basic Court Book is largely a record of law-breaking and squabbles and so the reviewer feels that thieves, slanders and the like create the impression that law-breaking was particularly prevalent in the Shetland Islands. One would like to be familiar with the Norwegian pattern at this period and also to be able to assess the significance of the illegal conversion from Norwegian to Scottish forms of tenure and law.

The section entitled "The People" has much of interest. The distribution of population is discussed together with the possible origin of the families according to their names. Individual inventories of property are given, together with the contemporary values, and show that in the north the social classes had been clearly defined while the taxation system bore heavily on the middle classes.

This volume is of value as emphasising that life was complicated by the Scottish legal concepts being harshly applied by a ruthless overlord despite assurances given a century earlier. The udal system of proprietorship had advantages in this

environment and may yet have some bearing on the outlook on problems between authorities and local people.

This volume is well illustrated by photographs but the bibliography is not so full as might have been expected. It is to be commended as the type of study which needs to be done before social histories of a district can be written. Students of geographical conditions in northern countries will not always agree with the conclusions believing, as they do, that physical conditions can account for some of the differences between the Shetland Islands and its "neighbours" the Færoes and Iceland. Incidentally the end paper maps do not locate Lerwick although this might be justified by the fact that the burgh was of later foundation.

ANDREW C. O'DELL

Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay. Collected by Rev. Fr. Allan McDonald of Eriskay (1859-1905). Edited by J. L. Campbell, M.A. (Oxon), Hon. LL.D. (Antigonish). Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. 64-65 Merrion Square. 1958. 301 pp. 18s.

Native speakers of Scottish Gaelic who are also students of the language are aware of words current in speech which are seldom, if ever, to be met with in print; yet systematic efforts to collect words in the most direct way possible have been few. The earlier dictionaries drew largely upon literary sources; and while Dwelly deserves credit for seeking out previously unrecorded words from correspondents representing various parts of the Gaelic-speaking area, these contributions only serve to draw attention to a source of information that has remained largely unexplored.

It might be expected that this lack would be made good by studies of various dialects undertaken within recent years. But the fact is that the time required to examine the phonetics, syntax and morphology of a dialect is not sufficient to gain a full mastery of its lexical and idiomatic content. This is possible only as a result of patiently amassing information as it happens to turn up over a prolonged period. Nor should the importance of some other factors be overlooked. Anyone undertaking such a task should of course be able to record what he heard with accuracy and understanding; he should be resident among the people and in close contact with their daily lives in its various aspects; yet he should not be one of them, for the native speaker's familiarity with his own dialect is apt to make him a

bad judge of what is noteworthy in it. Indeed, it might be argued that a person who has had to learn the language has some advantages in this respect over anyone else.

Father Allan McDonald conformed closely to these requirements. He was a parish priest in South Uist for twenty-one years, first in Dalibrog (1884-1893), and thereafter in Eriskay (1893-1905). Though a native of Lochaber, his knowledge of Gaelic in early life was defective, but he took up its study with enthusiasm while still at college. How thorough was the course of self-improvement he set himself will be realised by readers of *Eilean na h-Oige*, his description in verse of life in Eriskay; and it was this need for conscious application to the complexities of the language that made him such an acute observer of it. It might be added that we find his nearest counterpart to-day in Mr. J. L. Campbell himself, who is to be thanked for having Father Allan's lexicographical work published (under the auspices of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), and congratulated on carrying out his editorial duties with such skill and discrimination.

Perusal of a list of words taken mainly from non-literary sources leads to a realisation that we are to some extent in the domain of folklore. It is not only that Father Allan has recorded many interesting traditions attached to words in his collection. There is also the fact that some of the words themselves may yield their secrets only when subjected to the kind of scrutiny which has produced results particularly in folklore studies. There is, for instance, the importance of variants. It is probable that many words in this collection can be properly identified only after ascertaining variant forms in other dialects. To take one example, variants of *deurach*, a tingling pain, are *deighreach* (*d'eiðɔx*) for North Uist and *déireach* (*d'e:ðɔx*) for Ness, Lewis, forms which might suggest a connection with (*d*)*eigh*, ice, and the corresponding collective *eighre*(*adh*). Mr. Campbell has added variants from Barra, North Uist, Canna and Lewis, but only those from Barra are numerous enough to be regarded as a serious contribution in this direction. The following examples may give some idea of how much could still be done if the net were widely cast and the mesh sufficiently small. When from Father Allan's collection we take *buathann*, *builleltheanganna*, *buille-thuig*, *ciar cabhach*, *caicead*, *ceamh*, *clabag*, *craobh-iongnach*, *craoiceall*, *crubha*, *dioc*, *dreóghann*, *grùig*, *leagan*, *leideig*, *liosraich*, *mo near*, *sgeilmseag*, *sorrag*, *traoisgeir*, *tulaidh-bhriagan*, the corresponding series from Ness, Lewis, is *buaitheam*, *boile-thiongainn*,

buill'-ìg, *cabhach odhar*, *cacan*, *ghèa(mh)*, *clubag*, *ciribh-ìongnach*, *cruchaill*, *crubhagan*, *deic*, *tradhn*, *drùid*, *leogan*, *pleideag*, *lìosraig*, *m'an aire*, *sgiolmag*, *surrag*, *tarbhsgeir*, *tula-bhriagan*, (and similarly *tul-fhìrinn*). This list could be extended, more especially by good speakers of the dialect belonging to an older generation; and a similar list could be given, for example, from North Uist. (Sometimes, of course, it is not a question of variants, but of entirely different words for the same concept, and comparative lists of these would be very useful, particularly when their distribution could be shown on a map; sometimes, again, the words are the same but the meanings different).

Important for establishing the meanings of words is that they should be recorded in a variety of contexts. Unfortunately Father Allan was not always able to do this, so rarely were the words to be heard even in his day, and some of the meanings assigned in such cases must be regarded as tentative. Sometimes the figurative use of words gives rise to misleading, or at least unduly restricted, explanations; e.g., *leus*, a blister or welt left by a blow, and *tosgaireachd*, the abstract of *tosgaire*, an ambassador or messenger. There are some cases in which the meaning inferred from a particular context is erroneous. Thus *brimeil* is translated "contemptible creature" on the strength of *fìor bhrimeil an Roinn Eòrpa*, rendered "the most contemptible being in Europe". Father Allan wrote "MacCodrum" in brackets after the quotation, but in this instance he may not have meant that it is to be attributed to MacCodrum. Be that as it may, *brimeall* was in fact applied to the MacCodrums, the seal-folk of North Uist, and is the word for a bull seal (O.N. *brimill*)—also an epithet which, when cast up to connections of the MacCodrums, was once sufficient to start a fight!

No context is given for *deirilean*, explained as "a soft-hearted excitable creature"; but the word occurs in a poem published in 1631 in the Gaelic version of Calvin's Catechism (Reid 1832:174): *Thréges deirbhlean díleas Dé.* Another instance of it—and it is translated "orphans"—is from a Macrae lament (Macrae 1899:386) composed in the last decade of the seventeenth century: *Tha do dheirbhleinean broin / Mar ghair sheillein an torr.* (In Father Allan's orthography the epenthetic vowel is usually, though not always, written in, so that *deirilean* and *deirbhlean* are to be equated.) Also to be remembered is the reference in 1656 to a class of people in Wester Ross known as the "derilans" of Saint Mael-rubha: "theas poore ones quho are called Mourie his derilans, and ownes theas titles, quho

receawes the sacrifices and offerings wpon the accompt of Mourie his poore ones" (Dingwall Presbytery Records 1896: 282). The following genitive in the first example, and the use of the possessive pronoun in the others, suggests a relationship, as of people enjoying the protection respectively of God, of a father (and patron), and of a saint. We may compare *deidblén*, a weakling, orphan, pauper (RIA Contribb. 1959), the form in the above citations influenced perhaps by a feeling that it was a word (*deirbhleanbh* ?) from the class of compounds denoting family relationships that have *dearbh* as the first element. The puzzling term *seòl-sìth* may be further illustrated from North Uist, where it is associated with the Laings, descended from Andrew, son of the Rev. John Laing, schoolmaster of the parish early in the eighteenth century. *Seòl-sìdhe Chlann Andra* refers to the ease with which they are supposed to do certain things, such as memorising what they hear recited or sung, a gift bestowed, so it is said, by the fairies. Maximum effect with apparent minimum of effort may be the idea, as also of the related term *siubhal-sìdhe*.

Some further selected corrections and suggestions may be inserted here. *Bruthach na Seile-daraich* (p. 77) looks like an error for *Bruthach na Saile Daraich*, that is, the place in South Uist where was kept the oak log which was bored with an auger to kindle the neid-fire. The corresponding place in North Uist was on the Sollas machair at Skellor. (Cf. Carmichael 1928:II, 370). With *eadariona* should be compared *a bhi . . . an naodhnach cloinne*, translated by Alexander MacDonald as "to labour in Childbirth" (MacDonald 1741:160). *Faragradh* (2) must be for *farfhogradh*, which is to be compared with *farfhuadach*; the song now known as *Oran Mór Mhic Leòid* used to have the title *Farfhuadach a' Chlàrsair*. *Mar-bhi*, in the context referred to, is correctly translated as a noun meaning uncertainty; but in the usage of those who still know this as a noun, for example in Lewis, *mara-bhitheadh* also means a defect or imperfection. *Soc-shlinneineach*, which is left unexplained, means round-shouldered (cf. the Lewis expression *socadh 'san t-slinnean*, with the same meaning). *Seileach* or *teileach*, an adjective applied to the seal, appears to be an inaccuracy arising from the fact that the initial consonant is aspirated in the context quoted—*nàmhaid an ròin theilich*. But in Maclagan MS. No. 206 there is a song in which occurs the line *Bu du marbhaich (namhaid) Roin mheillich nan ob*, where *meilleach* must be the adjective from *meill*, a blubber lip (Robertson 1899-1901:360) and this doubtless also

gives us Father Allan's *meilleas*, thick lips. The *ùradh* is not removed from the newly made cloth by the waulking process, but by subsequent washing. Neil MacVicar (*Niall Ruadh Mór*), a North Uist bard and inveterate lampooner (*fl.* 1830), was once taunted as follows:

> Cluinn Niall Ruadh a' bùirеanaich,
> Cluinn na tairbh a' sumhnais ris;
> Chan 'eil clò a théid a luadh
> Nach toir Niall Ruadh an t-ùradh as.
>
> (Hear Red Neil bellowing,
> Hear the bulls snuffling-and-whining at him;
> There is no cloth that is waulked
> But Red Neil will extract the filth from it.)

In Appendix I, s.v. *buaidh*, *Gun bhuaidh ort!* seems rather weak as an imprecation; what the writer has heard is *Gon-bhuaidh ort!* On the same page *bunacha-bac* is strangely explained as "some unknown place outside Uist". It means the horizon, and is used in the singular (*bun-bac*) as well as in the plural. The primary meaning, however, appears to be the position above the eaves of the old-style house where the weights are tied to the ropes holding down the thatch; and the term has been applied to the horizon because of a comparison between the meeting of earth and sky and that of the wall and roof of a house. (See Dwelly, *bonnacha-bac*, s.v. *taigh*.) This Appendix also provides us with a ghost-word, *glù-thònadh*, which must be someone's mistranscription of *glutlionadh*, the North Uist word corresponding to Father Allan's *glutadh*, the packing of rubble and earth inside a wall.

Father Allan MacDonald had no training in phonetics, but he had a good ear and knew how to use the Gaelic orthography to advantage. His methods, such as the use of key-words to indicate certain vowel sounds, are surprisingly effective, though it should be added that this is partly due to the admirable way in which this aspect of his work has been interpreted and annotated by Mr. Campbell. Among minor ambiguities still remaining is the variable treatment of the epenthetic vowel, as already mentioned. There is also the fact that Father Allan seems never to write *èa* (e.g. *giadh* for *gèadh*), with the result that *ia* and *iə* are usually not distinguished; and there is a similar uncertainty about *a* in final syllables (e.g. *earraig*). It is to be regretted that phonetic transcriptions have not been given throughout, partly, as explained in the section on pronunciation,

owing to the cost, but also to the fact that many words are no longer known even to good speakers of advanced years. It would have been a good thing, nevertheless, to indicate, if only by an asterisk, what words have in fact been heard by the editor in South Uist.

It may be remarked that this Collection is more extensive than would appear from the title-page. Father Allan himself included the rarer words he met with in the compositions of the bards, particularly *Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair* and *Ailean Dall*, and also in old waulking-songs. The editor has added words collected in South Uist by the late Rev. Dr. George Henderson, Lecturer in Celtic at Glasgow University, and he has made use of another list from the hand of the late Rev. Dr. Angus MacDonald, Killearnan. Dr. MacDonald was a native of Benbecula, but it is not surprising that his collection has a distinct North Uist flavour, for he had a connection with that island both by immediate ancestry and by early education. Also included is a contribution from a collection made in South Uist by the editor.

Let it not be thought, however, that what is here brought together is a mere inert mass of words. Ever and again they are presented in a setting which brings them to life. Idioms, sayings, proverbs, charms, superstitions, games, customs, religious beliefs, place-names, personal names, botanical and zoological terms, technical terms connected with work on land and sea, obtained for the most part from monoglot Gaelic speakers born before the year of Waterloo—the book is a treasury of information on all these categories and many more; and not the least of Mr. Campbell's services is that he has supplied a classified index which enables the reader to explore any of them with the minimum of trouble.

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W. MATHESON

Scotland Before History. By Stuart Piggott and Keith Henderson. Nelson. 1958. VIII+112 pp. 15s.

Considerable progress has been made in our knowledge of the prehistory of Scotland since the late Professor Gordon Childe's *Scotland before the Scots* appeared in 1946, and the present book, written by Professor Piggott and illustrated by Mr. Henderson, has been designed to provide the general reader with an up-to-date synthesis in an attractive format and at a reasonable price.

As the preface says, the text is simply a long essay, divided into five parts, which describes in non-technical language the story of human settlement and development in what is now Scotland from the earliest times to the Roman occupation. The author's reputation is a sufficient guarantee of the reliability of the sources on which the narrative is based, and indeed many of the advances in the interpretation of the archæological evidence which are recorded in these pages derive directly or indirectly from Professor Piggott's own researches. Cases in point are the new theories concerning the architectural affinities and ritual of the Clyde-Carlingford and Clava cairns, the identification of the Cairnpapple earthwork as a "henge"-monument, and the brilliant reconstruction of the Deskford boar's head as a Celtic war-trumpet.

Unlike the tortured writing of some scholars, the prose is admirably lucid and graceful: this, in fact, is archæology designed to be read as literature. Equally impressive is the skill with which the dry bones of archæology—the wasting monuments in the fields and the dusty relics in the museum cases—have been brought to life by an alert and creative imagination without overstepping the limits of legitimate inference and deduction. No better first introduction to the prehistory of Scotland could be wished for, and although the

book quite properly dispenses with a bibliography and with footnotes, on the grounds that it is not intended for specialists, it can hardly fail to encourage many readers to delve more deeply into the subject. In order therefore to prevent alarm and despondency, it is perhaps as well to issue a warning that the chronology tentatively adopted by Professor Piggott may have to be substantially modified. Owing to the increased application of scientific methods of dating, new chronologies are at present being evolved; and radio-carbon dates obtained both in Britain and on the Continent since the book was written seem to indicate that the dates given therein for the first appearance of man in Scotland (*c.* 2,500 B.C.), and for the arrival of the Neolithic communities in Britain (*c.* 2,000 B.C.), may be up to 1,000 years too late. And although the margin of error naturally tapers towards the point where prehistory merges into history, there are now good reasons for thinking that the introduction of the Early Iron Age cultures into Scotland should be put back from the first century B.C. to the second, or even the third, century B.C.

Not the least merit of the text is that it stresses throughout the limitations of the archæological evidence, which can tell us a great deal about the technological achievements of our early ancestors, but little or nothing about their thoughts and feelings, their language, religious beliefs and social organisation. A reminder that prehistory is primarily concerned with people and not with things, can, however, be most easily conveyed by visual means, especially by reconstruction drawings, and a welcome feature of this book is that Mr. Henderson's illustrations have not been subordinated to the text but accorded an independent status. The chosen subjects cover a wide field including specimens of prehistoric flora and fauna, standing stones, tombs, habitations of various kinds, and scenes from everyday life. The drawings are vigorously executed, and added dramatic effect has been cleverly achieved by the employment of white-on-black technique, and by the occasional use of the "staring eye" (or empty eye-socket) to impart a subtle aura of those magical and dreadful influences which must have played a dominant part in the life of prehistoric man.

To the student of archæology, a synoptic view of this kind is valuable not only as a record of progress but as a stimulus to further research, and Scotland's prehistory still presents many problems. For example, why should the finest Neolithic chambered tomb in Britain occur in Orkney? What is the precise

significance of the apparent resemblances on plan between the Neolithic/Bronze Age houses in Shetland and certain Megalithic tombs and "temples" of the Western Mediterranean? What is the origin of the broch, and may we not postulate some connection, however remote, with the Sardinian *nuraghi* in view of the revised dating of the latter structures and the fact that they are no longer regarded as tombs? Why is it that there are so few burials in Scotland assignable to the period between the Late Bronze Age and post-Roman times? And what correlation, if any, can be established between the various classes of Early Iron Age settlements and the tribal pattern recorded by Ptolemy? These are only a few of the questions which spring to mind on reading this book, and which, given time and a reasonable measure of luck, it should be possible to answer by modern archæological techniques.

K. A. STEER

Studies in Irish and Scandinavian Folktales. By Reidar Th. Christiansen. Published for Coimisiún Béaloideasa Eireann by Rosenkilde and Bagger. Copenhagen. 1959. 249 pp. 32s.

Dr. Reidar Th. Christiansen of Oslo is one of Europe's outstanding folk-tale scholars. Not only is he an authority on Norwegian folk-tales and oral traditions generally, but he is equally distinguished in the Finnish field, while he is, of course, the only living scholar competent to write a comparative study of Irish and Scandinavian folk-tales. It is almost forty years now since Dr. Christiansen spent a long period in Scotland studying the Campbell of Islay collections, with the result that he probably knows them better than anyone in Scotland. Throughout his study there are frequent references to the work of Campbell of Islay and his collectors, but the main part of the work was written before the later Scottish collections of the post-1945 period began to take shape. The work done by Dr. John Lorne Campbell, K. C. Craig and others now exceeds the Islay collections in quantity, at least, if not in quality also. In a great many cases the texts of the Islay tales were abridgements, while the modern collectors have been able to secure more faithful versions, largely through the help of modern recording techniques. The variants recorded in this century, even if fragmentary at times, give a closer indication of genuine, narrative tradition. Even the tales noted down by K. C. Craig without the help of recording-gear are exact reproductions of actual narration.

Instead of taking a single tale and, by a meticulous examination of all its variants in all countries thus establishing an archetype to determine origin and distribution, Dr. Christiansen takes a group of tales popular in Scandinavian and Irish tradition, indicates their main characteristics in each area, decides if they have gone from Scandinavian to Irish tradition or *vice versa* or if there really is any direct contact at all.

The study reveals an unparallelled acquaintance with Irish and Scandinavian printed folk-tale material. He first studies the tales dealing with Giants and Dragons, Aa.-Th. types 300, 302, 303; then comes the Magic Flight, Aa.-Th. 313; The Mouse as Bride, Aa.-Th. 402; The Maiden in Search of her Brothers, Aa.-Th. 451; The Man on a Quest for his lost Wife, Aa.-Th. 400; The Magic Mill, Aa.-Th. 565; The Wizard and his Pupil, Aa.-Th. 325; The Boy who was never frightened, Aa.-Th. 326; Friends in Life and Death, Aa.-Th. 470; The Bridge to the Other World, Aa.-Th. 471 and, finally, the tale known as Godfather Death, Aa.-Th. 332. All are international tales and tales popular in Irish and Scandinavian tradition. The writer points out that the Irish versions are less uniform than those of Scandinavia and says that the reason for it is that the Irish, like Icelandic story-tellers, were conscious of an ancient literary tradition, they were more interested in the ornaments and technique of story-telling and tended to expand simple stories into more pretentious compositions. Dr. Christiansen, of course, identifies Scottish Gaelic with Irish tradition. That, however, is hardly true as far as folk-song and music traditions are concerned. I doubt if it is even true as far as the legends are concerned.

There are less of the above magic tale-types in current tradition in Scotland to-day than in Ireland, considerably so, I think. The reason is that the people in the Scottish Gaeltacht are more sophisticated than their Irish counterparts, while in Ireland the number of monoglot Irish-speakers is larger, and it is really among them that the outstanding story-tellers are to be found. Comparatively few versions of tales such as The Magic Flight, The Maiden in Search of her Brothers, The Wizard and his Pupil, and The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife have been recorded in Scotland within the last twenty years, while a prolonged search over a wide area of the Highlands and Islands resulted in one solitary version of the Magic Mill tale. That kind of material is going out of oral tradition.

Tales and legends illustrative of beliefs that still hold ground do put up a struggle for survival. The case of the tale of the Friends in Life and Death indicates how very difficult it is to know exactly what is in current tradition and what is not. In places it is told as a local legend, at other times it is fixed neither as regards time nor space. Dr. Christiansen states that there are three Irish versions of the tale and notes one from Scotland contributed by Campbell of Islay to the *Folklore Journal* VI: 184. Campbell states that the tale "is a rare one, now seldom told". Since 1945 three further versions of the tale have been recorded in Barra, Shetland and Easter Ross respectively, while during the winter of 1959-60 three further versions were recorded in South Uist. The South Uist versions are rather close to the story recorded by Larminie in Galway, while the Barra version is much closer to that of Shetland. Printed sources are unlikely to have influenced the distribution of this tale in Scotland, and what is noticeable is that only the versions from the east of Scotland and Shetland contain the invitation-to-the skull motif.

Dr. Christiansen concludes that there is little direct connection between Scandinavian and Irish folk-tales, even although for centuries the Norse and Gaels were in constant contact. Even despite the extent of Norse settlement in the Hebrides, for instance, the whole pattern of tradition is Gaelic-Irish. Only in isolated cases can direct contact be assumed, but it is impossible to say whether that is through some chance visits of a later day or by contact at an earlier period.

This is an extremely valuable book and is to be classed as compulsory reading for all students of the folk-tale.

C. I. MACLEAN

Scottish Farming, Past and Present. By J. A. Symon. Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London. 1959. ix+475 pp. 42s.

In tackling "the story of Scottish agriculture from its early beginnings" the author has essayed the impossible, and this is most evident in his opening chapters in which he seeks to describe husbandry in prehistoric and medieval times. Here the author hoists himself with his own petard; for, by boldly asserting that lack of documentation cannot excuse the general historians of Scotland for their neglect of this important subject, he raises hopes that are beyond his powers to fulfil. Perhaps in cautiously skirting this vexed matter the general historians reveal wisdom rather than ignorance. The best of them know

as much as is readily ascertainable about the subject but their training tells them that this is insufficient for a genuinely historical exposition of it. In such situations, the guess, the "hunch" and the forced analogy merely make confusion worse confounded. So far as the Dark Ages are concerned Mr. Symon is obliged to recognise this, but unfortunately he fails to see that in certain respects the more amply documented Middle Ages are merely, in truth, "darkness visible". He has a simple formula to overcome all difficulties, of which the main ingredients are an extremely general treatment, an uncritical use of sources, and anachronism. Thus, his description of run-rig husbandry in the Middle Ages draws largely upon eighteenth-century sources which describe eighteenth-century conditions—and which even for their legitimate purpose require critical handling. The result is entirely predictable. We encounter yet again the largely hypothetical norm that has been imposed upon run-rig, complete with stylised "diagrammatic representation of infield and outfield, after Wilson". This abstract work of art is about as remote from the rich variety of nature as anything evolved at La Tène—although in fairness to Mr. Wilson's article in "The Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society" for 1902 he was not unaware of its limitations. Much more to the point in Mr. Symon's work would have been a thorough study of a particular locality at a definite period, after the contemporary evidence. Perhaps the medieval records of Scotland, no matter how diligently studied, simply will not afford us such a luxury—save perhaps as regards monastic lands. In that case a plain statement of the inconclusiveness of the evidence must needs suffice.

Mr. Symon, however, elects for boldness, and as a consequence his chapters on the medieval period (whether he is discussing agricultural or social conditions) are far from satisfactory. His approach shows a fundamental defect which his merits of industry and unflagging enthusiasm cannot overcome —namely, his lack of the technical equipment required of the medievalist. Thus, his treatment of such matters as feudalism and serfdom are dated and misleading. Following Cosmo Innes, he tends to force the equation of *serf* and *slave*, but for this no real warrant is to be found in contemporary sources. Innes has been justly described by Sir Maurice Powicke as "a remarkable scholar", but it is inadvisable to-day to lean so uncritically on his pioneer work as Mr. Symon does. The general historians of our own time have not been as idle as all that. For instance,

Mr. Barrow in his book "Feudal Britain" (1956), in a few pages deals with this very problem neatly and trenchantly. Again, a much deeper insight into feudal and seignorial problems than that afforded by Innes can readily be found in the detailed introductions to Professor Croft Dickinson's editions of "The Sheriff Court Book of Fife" (Scottish History Society, 1928), and "The Court Book of the Barony of Carnwath" (S.H.S., 1937). Yet these quite basic works are never once referred to by Mr. Symon. Nor do references to Cunningham's "Church History of Scotland" (1859) or Ninian Hill's "The Story of the Scottish Church from the Earliest Times" (1919) inspire much confidence in Mr. Symon's treatment of ecclesiastical affairs. Acquaintance with more recent work on this important subject would surely have prevented him from writing of the decay of the Celtic Church in the time of David I. One can only conclude that in dealing with the Middle Ages the author has struggled conscientiously but to little purpose, and this verdict must cover agriculture no less than other topics that the author has unwarily discussed.

As he approaches more modern times the quality of Mr. Symon's work noticeably improves. Yet it must be confessed that his treatment of the eighteenth century is still disappointing. It is trite, rather superficial and still too generalised. Here the need for detailed regional studies is imperative; and that such studies are not only feasible but highly rewarding has been recently shown by Miss Third in her unpublished Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis "Changes in Eighteenth Century Rural Scotland" (1953) and one or two brief published articles based on it. The truth is that the old eclectic, superficial approach can no longer contribute anything to the understanding of this crucial but painfully complicated period. Far from being worked out, the "Agrarian Revolution" is still one of the boldest challenges to the historian of modern Scotland. Mr. Symon displays no awareness of this unhappy state of affairs. It is distressing to find him still holding to the old ill-focussed synoptic view, still displaying inability to evaluate his sources of information, still referring to works that do not carry much weight of authority nowadays—such as, for example, Anderson's "Scottish Nation". On the whole, Mr. Symon rests content with well-known facts culled from predictable sources to tell a familiar, but not necessarily illuminating, story. If his version were superior in the telling to existing accounts he might plead justification. But it is not; it lacks the

crisp clearness of Dr. Handley's "Scottish Farming in the Eighteenth Century" (1953).

It is almost as if Mr. Symon had written two books within the one cover, one of indifferent quality and the other of considerable merit. In his discussion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which takes up the greater part of the book, the author is clearly in his element. His grasp of the subject is surer, his treatment more penetrating and lucid. Not only has he mastered his materials but he also turns to good use his practical farming knowledge and his experience in the Department of Agriculture. Here he enjoys obvious advantages over the academic historian, and the result is some fine work judged by any standard.

Indeed, in a short review it is not easy to single out for praise any particular section in this part of the book when sound information and keen insight inform all. The present writer found Mr. Symon most informative in his study of the depression that set in after 1815, with its unexpected but convincing conclusion that Scottish farming, because of its adapability, fared less badly than English farming. This theme of the elasticity of Scottish agriculture figures even more prominently in the long depression that followed "the Prairie Corn Crisis". The effects of the two World Wars of the twentieth century are also sharply etched and make absorbing reading. These, it seems to the present writer, are the highlights of Mr. Symon's book which make valuable contributions to our knowledge of modern Scottish history. Valuable too are the specialised chapters which close the volume and which deal with such important topics as "Livestock", "Grasslands", and "The Potato". They bring together much useful but out of the way information. A distinctly useful feature of the book is also the bibliography of writings on Scottish agriculture of date prior to 1850.

All things considered, it is a pity that Mr. Symon did not limit his work to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for if he had he might have produced a book of high and uniform quality.

W. FERGUSON

The Silver Bough. Volume Two. A Calendar of Scottish National Festivals. Candlemas to Harvest Home. By F. Marian McNeill. William Maclellan. Glasgow. 1959. 21s.

In the first volume of *The Silver Bough* an attempt was made

to discover the main factors, geographical and historical, that had determined the character of Scottish folklore and folk-belief. The second volume covers a field less wide, and a subject less dependent upon the interpretation of evidence which is often extremely vague. Scottish calendar customs, with which this volume is concerned, are to a large extent historical facts, and the reader is accordingly less conscious of being caught in "the druidical mist", or in, to use a more modern term, "The Celtic Twilight". The author's plan was, to use her own words, to fit the scraps of Scottish folklore together like bits in a "jig-saw puzzle", and after "much juggling" she found a pattern clear and consistent, even if the reader is sometimes too much aware of the juggling to make the pieces fit, not so much by cutting and clipping, as by filling in the interstices with leaves from the Golden Bough.

Considering her plan, the first chapter on Medieval Plays may cause some surprise, but it contains very interesting descriptions of local festivals, and illustrations from old prints. The subsequent chapters, however, follow the calendar from St. Bride's-day-Candlemas to Harvest Home. These February festivals, including St. Valentine's day, raise a question that is present in any study of Scottish tradition; that is, the problem of assessing the true balance between Celtic, i.e. Irish Gaelic elements, and those that come from the continent, either directly or through English tradition. Apart from in the Northern Isles, traces of Scandinavian influence are curiously vague. The question is further complicated by the fact that in Celtic folklore as well, continental influence, often of a more ancient date, plays an important part, and further because the folklore collected in the Gaelic West is so much richer and more varied than that from the rest of Scotland, and besides is presented in such an attractive way as in the *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* and in the *Carmina Gadelica*.

Now the cult of St. Bride is of Irish origin, even if one may doubt her being "the successor of a Celtic goddess of the same name", but the beauty of the prayers and charms in the *Carmina* is independent of any explanation of possible origins. In these February festivals one point worth noting is the decisive part played by the women. The special festival parties of the women (p. 26) have their counterpart in similar gatherings in Germany and France, "where men were not admitted until the evening", and such practices are part of the idea that February was the month of women (*der Weibermonat*),

an idea that can be traced back to the Romans. Ceremonies of this kind are known from various countries, and the sole reminiscence seems to be the privilege of women to propose, restricted sometimes to a leap year, or even to the 29th of February, the extra day put in after the calendar reform, sometimes fixed at February the 14th, or St. Valentine's day. One may refer to a very interesting paper written by H. A. Rose (*Folklore* vol. 30): "Customary restraints on celibacy." Probably the girl referred to by Ophelia exercised this privilege, cf. the next verse, and did not meet her sad fate, only because she happened to be the "first met".

In the long list of rites and ceremonies, well written and arranged, almost every point has parallels from outside Scotland, even if the background suggested is not always convincing. Compare e.g. as a background for the cockfights, the statement that "the cock was a sacred solar bird", the distance being bridged with a "nevertheless". There is the "dreaming bannock", well known in Scandinavian countries, and "the dumb supper" known in the American countryside, with a slightly different rite. Salted bannocks are baked and eaten in complete silence by the girls, who naturally will dream about offering or being offered a drink, and from the nature of the beverage chosen—beer, milk and water—their future circumstances may be inferred. Easter eggs, often coloured, are also widely known, but not the rolling of them, whether or not it is "a symbol of the stone rolled from the tomb of Christ" (It is still done on Easter morning on the White House lawn in Washington D.C.).

The chief landmarks of the Celtic calendar were Beltane and Samhain. The first is associated with the sun, fire and spring. The reason may be that to the druids the sun was the centre of divinity, and fire "their medium of expression", but, to quote the author, "of the mysteries enacted by the druids nothing is known", and the lacuna is hardly filled in with a passage from *Prince Otto*, by R. L. Stevenson. Maypoles are known elsewhere, but were they "of course a phallic emblem", any more than say the Christmas tree or even the round towers of Ireland? May fires are lit in some places in Sweden, but generally they belong to Midsummer, the first of May being too early to celebrate the arrival of spring. Again the reader is grateful for good descriptions of local ceremonies. On Midsummer day, in Shetland "simmer-mal", fires are still blazing in Northern Europe, and in Western France branches of the

birch tree are taken into the house, fixed to the horses' harnesses, even to the railway engines, or, in Ireland, fastened to the gates. Flowers are common in divination rites elsewhere. From the illustration it is hard to identify the St. John's wort. The dictionary says: "a plant of the genus Hypericum", which corresponds to its Swedish name *Johannes-ört*, and to the German *Johannis Kraut*. It was always believed to have protective powers against anything evil. As for the Michaelmas races, reference may be made to a study of such practices, written by Prof. Solheim (*Studia Norvegica* nr. 8, 1956). At Harvest Home, finally, the last sheaf, "the May Maiden" etc. represents the Scottish variant, with several characteristic touches, of similar rites in other countries, enacted to ensure the continuity of the yield of the fields, a problem of supreme importance in any agricultural community.

In this way the present volume of *The Silver Bough* has brought together and made accessible in an attractive manner a large amount of information, and if a reader may disagree as to the explanation and the interpretation of some rite, he will be grateful for a valuable compendium of information.

REIDAR TH. CHRISTIANSEN

An exhibition of traditional Scottish agricultural technology

The National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland held an exhibition recently, dealing with Scottish agricultural implements and techniques, which has been an important landmark in the move to bring Scottish ethnographic studies, and the material culture aspect thereof in particular, into line with developments in Scandinavia, and, indeed, in other parts of the British Isles. Whilst local folk museums are doing vital work there is an imperative need for a focal point, where the nation as a whole can see the progress of ethnographic research, appreciate its significance, and thus be induced to participate, as has been done, for example, at Skansen and St. Fagans. It is in this connection that the enterprise of the National Museum of Antiquities in creating the post of an Assistant Keeper dealing with Scottish ethnology, with the subsequent appropriate appointment of Mr. A. Fenton, is now bearing its first fruits.

A series of annual exhibitions of traditional aspects of Scottish rural economy has been planned, and the opening of the first of these in June 1960 coincided very suitably with the Royal Highland Agricultural Show. This initial venture, which

was confined to agricultural technology, aroused considerable interest among visitors, and this in turn led many farmers to offer further material. Considerations of space, which press heavily on the National Museum, made it necessary for the exhibition to be sited away from the main building. Whilst this may have been a slight disadvantage there has been the compensation of it being, virtually, a self-contained unit.

Attractively laid out, the exhibition reconciled very satisfactorily the conflicting claims of the mass of material which has been collected, with the selective limitation on exhibits necessary to retain the interest of the average viewer. Carefully arranged with regard to interrelationship and chronology, the exhibits were accompanied by fully explanatory texts and by photographs. In his selection Mr. Fenton chose, with regard to the space at his disposal, to treat some selected themes in detail rather than to attempt a comprehensive coverage of agricultural technology. The contents included an entire smithy, a sequence on plough evolution ranging from prehistoric to nineteenth-century types, sowing, reaping, and thrashing implements, types of harness, peat cutters, an interesting miscellany of veterinary equipment, branks, "horse-throwers" and other features of an age of more robust animal management. An especially interesting section is that devoted to ropes and rope-making where considerable interpretative research is apparent. The further implications of distribution and comparative linguistics have been followed up, showing clearly that even in so relatively small a field, a pattern of traditional regional usages can contribute much to more general historical studies.

The National Museum's enterprising and encouraging experiment has been most successful. It is intended to vary the emphasis of these; the next one, which is to open in the Spring of 1961, will specialise in traditional crafts. It is by means such as this, in association with the efforts of local museums and interested societies throughout the country, that the public will be made aware of the importance of scientific study in the field of Scottish ethnology.

IAIN A. CRAWFORD

A Society for Folk Life Studies

As mentioned in our last issue, in May of this year, the need for regular meetings of those concerned in Folk Life Studies in

these Islands was agreed by all who took part in the 1959 Symposium of the School of Scottish Studies on "Aims and Methods in Material Culture research" (*Scottish Studies* 4, 1960, 120).

This year's meeting of the British Association at Cardiff provided an opportunity for many of those interested in the formation of a new society to discuss the matter in a wider setting, and a steering committee consisting of the following persons was appointed to meet at Reading at a later date: Messrs. J. G. Jenkins (Welsh Folk Museum), C. A. Jewell (University of Reading), A. T. Lucas (National Museum of Ireland), B. R. S. Megaw (University of Edinburgh), C. S. Mundy (University College, London), I. C. Peate (Welsh Folk Museum), and S. F. Sanderson (University of Leeds). The results of this meeting will be announced in the New Year.

EDITOR