waxed vailent in fight and Made Severall to fall to the ground and like davids vailent Men of old ought to be Named amongst the first three

DAVID SIMPSON

Book Reviews:

Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs. By Thomas Crawford. Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1960. xvi+400 pp. 35s.

Mr. Crawford has done a rare, difficult, and valuable thing. He has written a critical work on the poems of Burns without being deflected into biography or dithyrambics on Burns the Man. There are signs that something similar may happen to Byron; which is salutary, since after all the reason why the men are remembered is that they wrote the poems.

There are various ways of doing it, but Mr. Crawford is doubtless right in pushing ahead empirically, in the light of the critical methods in vogue and the main themes that occupy attention nowadays. The result is a book with which anyone can agree or disagree in detail as he reads; and that is the best thing a critic can do for his reader and his subject, for the attention is on Burns, not on any "original" "revaluation" or pretentious theory which would focus attention on the critic rather than on the subject. It is a book for students of Burns by a student of Burns, and one is grateful for it, and for the obvious fact that this student admires his author. To deal properly with it, then, one would have to go over it in detail and discuss one's agreements and disagreements with points as they arise, but that could be done satisfactorily only in long sederunts with Mr. Crawford. That one feels like that is the best proof that Mr. Crawford has done what he set out to do; in a review one had best confine oneself to general impressions.

Mr. Crawford is indubitably right in treating Burns as a poet in his own time and place. He has tried to work back beyond "Romantic" ideas and to establish his critical position first in the late eighteenth century and then in the present day. In this he has not been quite successful. Eighteenth-century literature was primarily social. For success, a writer had to be a social being and also a forcible individual. Burns was both, and, as Mr. Crawford, like Jeffrey before him, points out, he was not isolated but grew up in a society which was neither unintelligent nor illiterate. He must be studied not only as an individual bundle of emotions *plus* a philosophic mind, but

also as an individual in relation to other individuals and a participant in the interests, occupations, and ploys of his time. Relations and participations must be examined in terms of society as well as in terms of emotion and thought, and they will then be seen to exist on different levels. Personal relations may vary from deep love and hate to casual acquaintance, and many things do not involve deep convictions about religion, politics, or sex. It is here that I am dubious about some of Mr. Crawford's judgements. He takes everything with a uniform seriousness that (to my mind) is inappropriate, for a social being like Burns would not. The emotion of *Ae fond kiss* may be a profound personal experience, but it is on a different and more general plane that Burns blithely hymns *the lasses O*!

This difference of levels may be observed in the Epistles. The epistle in verse—and, as W. P. Ker pointed out, especially the verse epistle in braid Scots—was a well understood thing. It could be used for different motives, and it must observe the distances between the parties. To write to a close companion of youth like David Sillar was one thing, to reply to a "fan letter" from one who claimed notice as a fellow poet like Lapraik was another, to answer an invitation from a genial acquaintance with whom Burns had hit it off on a cheerful evening, like Logan, was yet another. Mr. Crawford fails in taking the epistle *To the Goodwife Of Wauchope House* as an example of how "many of Burn's compliments to the aristocracy sound utterly hollow and unreal today". Mrs. Scott, like Lapraik, had liked the Kilmarnock poems and wrote to say so. Like many of her kind—and some of her relatives—she enjoyed spinning rhymes, and, with good precedent, wrote in the accepted fashion, to which Burns replied in kind. That is all there is to it. The familiarity of address was part of the game. To have addressed Dr. Blacklock in an ordinary letter as "my good old cockie" and to have referred to Mrs. Blacklock as "honest lucky" would have been mere bad manners; in the convention it was admissible and would be appreciated by all concerned. Part of the whole affair, and of eighteenth century writing as a whole, was, again, the pleasure of skill. Cleverness was—and is—a value.

This obtains throughout the poems and songs, and if we do not notice it we miss something not only characteristic but remarkable. Burns was entirely aware of his audience and modulated tone, style, and sentiment accordingly. He was not always tactful, but on the whole he judged his distances

and expressed his shades of meaning and feeling with admirable precision. It is a mistake to think of him as emotionally identified with his subjects at all times, and of his cooler exercises of observation as failures. Mr. Crawford has reservations about the *Farmer's Address to his Auld Mare Maggie*. Does he expect Burns to be sloppy about a horse, or find it necessary for him to be continually making the quasi-allegorical connexion that occurs in *To a Mouse*, when a trivial happening coincides with the poet's mood and so acquires a personal significance? *Hallowe'en* is a matter of manners-painting touched with gossipy satire; *The Cottar's Saturday Night* (which one is glad to see Mr. Crawford giving its proper value) is manners-painting touched with respect and a sort of regret for lost innocence. *The Jolly Beggars* is more complex—too complex to discuss here —but it also is manners-painting, touched with the infectious hilarity of the scene, but observed from a distance sufficient to make Burns criticise by the very form of the poem, halfway between *Hallowe'en* and *The Beggar's Opera*.

I am dubious also about Mr. Crawford's values as shown by his comparisons with other poets. The comparison of the close of *John Anderson My Jo* with that of Wordsworth's utterly different poem *A slumber did my spirit seal* is merely inept. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, and Mr. T. S. Eliot are the great figures for Mr. Crawford's generation. Burns certainly must stand up to the tests involved in giving him his proper place among the great, but are these comparisons fruitful? I should rather use Burns to test them: they would each come rather badly out of it, to my mind. The Cambridge habit of eternally placing writers in ranking order is getting tiresome, and is of no great use to critical understanding or appreciation. So is the older and commoner habit of conscripting writers into our own sectarian armies, moral, political, ecclesiastical, and so on. We need discrimination, and Burns can be discriminated as a writer, and his writings from one another, only by someone who knows the eighteenth century writers, minors like Soame Jenyns and the Whiteheads and Peter Pindar and Byrom and Scott of Amwell as well as Pope and Fielding, and knows them by having read and enjoyed them for their own sakes at their own level, by reading, not by the self-conscious, conscientious process of "research". Mr. Crawford's attitude to the eighteenth century men is too much that of Herr Ritter, whom he has found all too helpful. He is oppressed by two academic habits, that of Göttingen (let us say) and that of Cambridge. It is

natural, and perhaps proper; other men have gone too far the other way. He is oppressed also by the expectation that he should take sides, which distorts, for instance, his view of Burns's Edinburgh acquaintances and of the results of his visit in 1787. On the other hand he has the advantage of native knowledge of Scottish values in speech, feeling, and—if he would allow himself to see it more broadly—social habit.

This notice seems critical of Mr. Crawford, but is really sympathetic. The difficulties are understood. He has given us an unco quantity of fine confused feeding, and deserves our gratitude for it. A student fresh to Burns may not have a clear, precise, well-lit figure in his head: all the better. No student who has gone any way into Burns dare neglect Mr. Crawford's book, or will be tempted to undervalue it.

W. L. RENWICK

More West Highland Tales, Volume II. Edited by Prof. Angus Matheson, J. MacInnes, Prof. H. J. Rose and Prof. K. Jackson. Oliver and Boyd. Edinburgh. 1960. 55s.

The problem of editing and publishing the large corpus of Gaelic folk-tales collected in Scotland, in MS and on tape, is a formidable one. Indeed two distinct problems are involved: one concerning scholarly manpower and the other concerning finance. But both may be said, in a sense, to stem from the same public attitude, an indifference to a large slice of the history of Scotland. It is this indifference which makes specialisation in Gaelic studies seem foolhardy to many students, and which makes funds for research and publication hard to acquire.

The book under review is a most handsome contribution to the publication of these Gaelic folk-tale riches, yet it underlines certain problems which should be faced. It would take many more volumes of this size to complete the publication of Campbell of Islay's MSS, and there still remains the large quantity of material collected in Scotland by members of the Irish Folklore Commission and of the School of Scottish Studies, and by other private collectors during the last hundred years. This is not a task that should be tackled haphazardly, or on a shoe-string budget: to do it that way is almost inevitably to do it badly.

Ideally, publication and analysis of this corpus of folk-tales should go hand in hand. This would entail a great deal of preparatory work: the meticulous cataloguing and calendaring of the collections, and the compiling of motif and other indexes.

Such a process would enable the whole publication to be planned on orderly lines, making the maximum contribution to understanding of a subject which at best is lit by fitful, if magical, lights.

The editors of the present volume have had to contend with these basic difficulties, not of their own making, and not susceptible to solution by them. They have had to contend with other difficulties to which they are anxious not to admit. A great deal of work on the Campbell MSS had been done by J. G. Mackay, who had largely prepared this and as yet unpublished volumes for the press. "Volume II is indeed his memorial", says Professor Jackson in his prefatory note. But Mackay had apparently committed himself to a volume-by-volume publication of Campbell's materials without substantial rearrangement of the items. A collection made a hundred years ago, and for long available for inspection, need not be published in so mechanical a way.

Furthermore, Mackay had adopted principles of textual editing which are now quite out of fashion, and rightly so. Admittedly his problem was not an easy one. He had to deal with versions of tales from a wide variety of dialect areas, written down by many different scribes of widely varying competence. Some, like John Dewar, seem to have been to a large extent illiterate in Gaelic; others, like Hector Maclean, were fully literate. Some may have set too great a store on their literacy: probably J. G. Mackay himself did. It is disconcerting to see from footnotes here and there that Mackay altered words and expressions, to bring the diction of the tales closer to a literary norm of which he approved. Thus on p. 120 the MS form *sloop* has been changed to *aon-chrannaich*, and on the same page *maighstir* is substituted for *caibhtinn*; but on p. 126 *caibhtinn* is retained. On p. 126 also, the MS *air son an do cheannaich e iad* has been changed to *do'n do cheannaich e iad* (The gain, if it is a gain, is very marginal). On p. 164, the MS *Dh'fheòraich e air son na banachaig* has become *Chuir e fios air a' bhanchaig*, which has a different nuance. The form *dhuit* appears regularly, for all dialects represented, but other forms which are not nineteenth century standard literary Gaelic are retained, e.g. *char* (= *chaidh*), *dar* (= *nuair*), *roimhid* (= *roimhe*), *na leòr* (= *gu leòr* or *nas leòr*), and *dorusd* (= *dorus*). In many instances the MS forms are given in footnotes, but the editorial principles are not clear enough to indicate when we have dialect forms retained and when not. The impression that one gets is that

Mackay could not make up his mind how to tackle this problem. This makes the book somewhat less valuable for students of Gaelic as distinct from students of the folk-tale.

It should be emphasised, however, that when we allow for these vagaries of Mackay's, the Gaelic text has been edited with great skill, sensitivity and consistency by Professor Angus Matheson, and seen through the press with meticulous care by the editorial team, and especially (as is acknowledged) by Mr. John MacInnes. But in any future volumes it would be only fair to the editors that the bogey of Mackay's predilections should be firmly laid.

The items in this volume are varied in subject matter and in style, and the volume might for this reason have a fairly wide appeal, although the price indicates that the publishers do not anticipate this. The stories range from historical or semi-historical anecdotes such as *Murchadh, Mac Tighearna Ghèarr-loch*, and *Sliochd nam Burraidhean* (the story of a disastrous fight between two septs of the MacCallums), to stories in which several international folk-tale themes are intertwined, such as *Uirsgeul na Nighinn gun Bhaisteadh*, in which the themes of the Homecomer's Vow, Bluebeard, and the Calumniated Wife appear, the latter being worked out in some detail. In between these extremes there are legendary, semi-historical stories such as *Feadan Dubh an t-Siosalaich*, the tale of a seventeenth century Chisholm chief's visit to Italy and his piper's acquiring of a black pipe chanter of special value; plain adventure stories with no supernatural elements, such as *Mac an t-Seòladair*, *An Nighean Sgitheanach* (a tale of how a Skye maid acquired riches and lived happily thereafter), and *Mac a' Chìobair* (a fantastic story of a poor man's wooing of a rich man's daughter); stories about fairies and mermaids, such as *Fear Gheusdo* (which tells of the magical transporting of a cow from Skye to Uist, and the eating of a *bodach-sìdhe*, or fairy changeling, by those left at home in Skye), and *A' Mhaighdean Mhara* (the popular story of how a mermaid marries a human being); folk-tales largely concerned with a succession of shape-shiftings, such as *Fiachaire Gobha* and *Na Trì Saighdearan*; and tales of enchantment and deliverance, such as *An Cat Glas* and *Fear a' Bhratain Uaine*. The book would have benefited from a more coherent arrangement of the stories.

Some of these seem to be of particular interest because their themes are meagrely attested in Scottish Gaelic tradition. Thus *An Cat Glas* is a "Cat-redaction" of a fairly widespread

European story of enchantment and deliverance not otherwise known in Scottish Gaelic printed sources (Reidar Christiansen remarks in *Irish and Scandinavian Folk-tales*, p. 114, that "Welsh and Scottish Gaelic versions do not occur".) The theme of corpse-eaters, which occurs in *Am Marsanda agus an Duine Eile*, is also rare in Gaelic tradition.

The style and plot of the stories varies from the triple repetition that is so common in Gaelic folk-tales to continuous, and sometimes gripping, narrative. Sometimes the language is stylised (although there are not many "runs" in these stories); at other times it is plain, or even bald. Anglicised usages appear in some, as in *Fear a' Bhratain Uaine*, while others retain a sinuous Gaelic idiom throughout. There is much useful work to be done on an analysis of these various styles, and on the possible connections of certain of them with the literary as opposed to the folk tradition in Gaelic. The overall impression one gets is of a people marvellously at ease with the seen and the unseen worlds, using a language that has been made malleable for the purpose of such story-telling over many centuries. When the Census statistics come to us later this year they will tell us only half-truths about Gaelic in Scotland. Their story will be one of decline in numbers: they can tell us nothing of the quality of this speech, which still graces many small gatherings throughout Scotland.

Something must be said about the notes to the stories. Most of these are by J. G. Mackay, whose extensive and curious fund of information must excite admiration. He quotes many parallel versions of stories, and these lists are sometimes extended by the editors. It is to be regretted that the editors did not feel free to extend their own share of the notes, and it is to be hoped that this self-effacement will not survive in any future volumes. An index of rarer words would have been welcome: one of the few words to escape the editors' fine net is *òrd*, on p. 44, where the MS's *òrd mhath mhaide* should doubtless have been retained, in the sense of "a good *piece* of wood" (Mid. Ir. *ordu* is feminine, and the word survives in some Gaelic dialects, usually in connection with fish—*òrd(u) éisg* "a morsel of fish"). There remain some obscurities of vocabulary, but these are very few in number, and the editing of the text, and the translation, have added considerably to our precise knowledge of Gaelic usage. The translation is itself something of a work of art.

DERICK S. THOMSON

Poems From Panmure House. Edited with an Introduction by Helena Mennie Shire. Printed at Cambridge for *The Ninth of May*. By Sebastian Carter.

These two poems and one traditional ballad are transcribed from the Commonplace-book (ca. 1630) of Robert Edwards, minister of Murroes Parish two miles north of Broughty Ferry, a dozen miles from the Newtyle house—still occupied—where the Bannatyne MS was written seventy years previously.

The two poems, which may be songs, are pleasant but undistinguished. The ballad version of "The Sheath and the Knife" (Leesome Brand) with its perfect refrain, is a treasure:

> There was a sister and a brother
> the sun gois to under the wood
> who most intirelie lovid othir
> god give we had nevir beine sib. . . .

Mrs. Shire has printed opposite the Scottish ballad the Danish "Redselille og Medelvod" (Roselille and Ole) which, with her Introduction, Gloss and Commentary, make her booklet a valuable addition to ballad scholarship as William Motherwell foresaw:

> "Could, however, there be MS copies of other of our ancient ballads recovered, it certainly would be a most desirable and valuable acquisition."

One suggestion. She refers (p. 9) to "the poignant refrain of the broom, celebrating lost loveliness:

> The brume blooms bonnie and says it is fair. . . .
> And we'll never gang doun to the brume onie mair."

But the incest motive in this version of "Leesome Brand", compared with "The Broom of Cowdenknows", "The Broomfield Hill" and the song "Allan Maclean" with its stanza:

> I asked bonny Sally
> To go to the broom
> "O yes" replied Sally
> "Tho it be to my ruin,

all suggest that the broom is a traditional symbol for illicit love.

WM. MONTGOMERIE