

Book Reviews

Tales from Barra. Told by the Cuddy. With Foreword by Compton Mackenzie and Introduction and Notes by J. L. Campbell. Printed for the Editor by W. and A. K. Johnston and G. W. Bacon Ltd., Edinburgh 1960.

The Cuddy—John MacPherson, postmaster of Northbay, Barra, who died in 1955—was a celebrated public figure on his native island. The boarding-house known as Taigh a' Choddy, built to accommodate the tourists who, between the wars, started coming to Barra from all the airts, was soon a centre from which the folklore and folk-tales of the island were disseminated orally through the length and breadth of Britain, and beyond. In Egypt, during World War II, I heard the story of the Weaver and the Little Weaver (pp. 81-88 in this volume) told in English by a Medical Officer who had heard it two or three years previously when out fishing with the Cuddy.

Dr. John Lorne Campbell, who has put Scotland greatly in his debt by his devoted and indefatigable pioneer folklore research in the Hebrides, has done commemorative justice to the Cuddy's story-telling powers in this charmingly got-up little miscellany. Nearly all the material was told in English, and taken down in shorthand by Miss Sheila J. Lockett. Dr. Campbell has written an introduction which not only provides information about the Cuddy's life and family tree but also gives the reader as much as he can conveniently digest of Barra's history and present problems.

The stories themselves range from international folk-tales to yarns about the famous "Polly", the whisky ship which was wrecked off Eriskay in 1941. There are also tales and anecdotes about the MacNeils and other Highland chiefs which are a most entertaining blend of orally transmitted fact and fantasy. The concluding sections offer a fascinating gallimaufry of stories and beliefs about fairies, ghosts, second sight and witchcraft.

That the Cuddy was an expert raconteur in English as well as in Gaelic is obvious even from the printed page. Indeed, for his English-speaking audience, either at Taigh a' Choddy, or around and about Barra during fishing expeditions, he seems to have developed a special style which one might term, without the least disrespect, a kind of dignified "dragoman" style. This it is which gives the little book its distinctive bouquet.

At its best, the Cuddy's style has a laconic deadpan humour which recalls Damon Runyon. Here is a prison guard talking to two Barramen who are languishing in French captivity during the Napoleonic wars:

"Well, boys", he says, "I am hearing you talking Gaelic, and I am hearing you also complaining about the food. Well, I have no other alternative but to agree with you that the food is very bad". (p. 62)

Or here, MacNeil at the Battle of Bannockburn:

". . . he stripped down to his kilt only and his braces . . . he was mowing the English enemy down wholesale and retail." (p. 44)

At times he comes away with a remark of devastating epigrammatic simplicity:

"This is, of course, a traditional story which nobody could say whether it is right or wrong." (p. 104)

In the stories of supernatural folklore one feels that the Cuddy's English is less adequate to his task than in the lighter tales. Occasionally he takes the easy way out, and omits passages which (if one happens to have come across Gaelic recordings of the same material) seem a genuine loss. For example, in *How Time was Lost in the Fairy Knoll*—a variant of No. 470 in the Aarne-Thompson type-index—the Brevig man who goes to the shore to look for treasures washed up by the sea catches sight of a human jawbone. In the Gaelic version recorded by the late Dr. Calum I. Maclean on 1st October 1946 (Irish Folklore Commission MS 1028, pp. 468-478), this version goes:

. . . Chan fhaca e dad sam bith ann ach claban duine a bha a' tionndadh an dràsda is a rithist 'nuair a bhristeadh a' rùid a staigh, agus dh'fhalbh e sìos gu grunn a' phoirt, agus thog e an claban agus choimhead e air, agus thòisich e 'na inntinn fhéin air moladh, agus b'fhiach e sin a mholadh, àilleachd na fiaclan a bha 's a' chlaban, agus thubhairt e ris a' chlaban, "Nach briagha an fhàilt a dh'fhàgadh tu ann am bonnach mór eòrna agus clapaire math do dh'im Gàidhealach air", agus e a' sadadh bhuaithe a' chlabain. . . .

(Translation: He saw nothing at all but a man's skull which turned over now and then when a swell burst in; he went down to the shore of the Port, and he lifted the skull and looked at it, and he began, in his own mind, to praise—and it was worthy of praise—the beauty of the skull's teeth. And he said to the skull, "Wouldn't you leave a lovely mark in a big barley bannock with a good lump of Highland butter on it!"—and with that he threw the skull away.)

Here is the same passage, told in English and taken down in shorthand:

He stood above the Port, and seeing nothing except a human jawbone with beautiful white teeth. The jawbone drawing his attention very much, he went down to the sea, picked it up and examined it, and said to himself that it was the finest set of teeth that he had ever seen—and at that stage he threw it away, and walked up. (p. 173)

The idiomatic difference is obvious.

For the interest of readers understanding Gaelic, Dr. Campbell gives as an appendix a transcription of a wire recording of the Gaelic version of *MacNeil of Barra, the Widow's Son and the Shetland Buck*. This story is of considerable interest, because of the picture it ingenuously but convincingly presents of the wanton and arbitrary despotism which must all too often have underlain clan chief autocracy. MacNeil takes a fancy to the Mingulay widow's son, and carries him off to Barra, in spite of his mother's distress. When the boy grows up, and has strength enough to beat him in wrestling matches, the Chief attempts to murder him by ordering the crew of the *birlinn* to put to sea in a hurricane. Later in the story, the Chief treacherously attempts to use his *sgian dubh* on a wrestling champion he has failed to beat in a fair fight.

Whatever one may think of the subsequent coming of the "Law" to *dùthaich mhic Nill*—Dr. Campbell has documented this in *The Book of Barra*—one cannot help feeling that the abolition of the heritable jurisdictions must have been greeted with some relief by the ordinary clansman. The Cuddy explains the place name *Cnoc a' Chrochadair* as follows (p. 117):

When MacNeil of Barra had somebody to hang he would notify the *crochadair* to come up, and his salary was, I understand, this: he had a little dominion there at Cnoc a' Chrochadair and it belonged to him. Hanging was his only job, and he got as salary a free croft for doing it.

HAMISH HENDERSON

Gaelic-speaking children in Highland schools. Publications of the Scottish Council for Research in Education XLVII. U.L.P. 1961.

This is a commendable book. It states its aims clearly (p. 21) and, within the restrictions of this mandate, it operates competently and informatively. It places the investigation with

which it is concerned in its historical perspective, showing why these investigation points it deals with are chosen specifically at this time (p. 16 ff.). It gives maps, tables and graphs from which one can easily read the basis and product of its research and many of the problems that arise out of it. The questionnaires used to obtain the data are given in Appendix I (p. 67). In the Conclusions (p. 63 ff.) it shows itself aware of many of the problems and concerned with effecting practical remedies. There is a short bibliography at the end.

One of the first things that strikes one on reading the book is the way in which it corroborates in detail the findings of the national Census on the steady decline in the numbers of speakers of Gaelic and also (maps, pp. 18 and 19) the diminution of the area within which Gaelic is used. The book is at pains to give a corrected picture of the general statistics of speakers within this area: to point out that there are subdivisions within it representing points of relative Gaelic strength and weakness (map 3, p. 30; table IV, p. 32). It is important to point out these facts, as they are central to any remedial plan to be put into effect. The same table and map that show us this indicate also the way in which Anglicisation proceeds and how it is most intensive in focal areas of trade and commercial activity. This ties in with the information which we get from table X, p. 44 about the relationship between the occupation of parents and the use of Gaelic by their children. The social and economic implications of these last two findings make them disturbing reading indeed.

The project that the book reports on was undertaken as a piece of educational research: cf. p. 13 “. . . the fundamental problem underlying this investigation is how best to educate a child who has knowledge of more than one language”. The field of investigation was the schools in the Highland Counties and particular attention was directed to children in the first and second Primary classes and in the first year of Secondary schools. The reasons for this are given and appear unexceptionable. One of the primary problems that faced the researchers arose from the complexity of the bilingual situation—when it became obvious that the questionnaire used for getting information about Primary schools could not be used unrevised for Secondary schools (pp. 23-4). This difficulty indicates the necessity for doing a thorough analysis of the bilingual situation in all its aspects if one is to be secure in one's premises when one is investigating a restricted situation. We have mentioned

above that this survey, starting (for obvious reasons) with the counties as units, had to make a revised breakdown into smaller areas; and even taking districts as units it is found that there is no secure, one-to-one relationship between organisational units of this kind and levels of bilingualism (p. 31, par. 1). When there are widely varying levels to be found in the one school this presents a difficult teaching problem but one nevertheless, that must be tackled as real and relevant.

There are other features of this complexity that may be commented on. There is the problem of the relative importance of the home, the community and the school. There is no denying the basic formative influence of the home but we know from the study of other social patterns that as the child builds up outside contacts this tends to be a waning influence. This leads us to consider such features as to what extent the home reflects the community. One of the things that table X shows is the extent to which the homes of professional people, for example, are not integrated. One of the reasons for the finding that the Primary school, despite the use of English in it, does not have a great deal of influence on the child's use of Gaelic is that the school is not regarded in many ways—and, unfortunately, with justice—as an integral part of the community but rather as part of an external organisation. On the other hand many children when they go to Secondary school, especially Senior Secondary, have to be transplanted from their home community. They live in hostels and the contacts they make are mostly within the school so that the school, to a considerable degree, performs the function of home and community as well; and the lingua franca is English. There are good reasons for this. One of them is that the language of school has for these children always been English: they feel themselves in a situation for which English is the appropriate language and they have been trained to cope with new situations of the type with which they are faced in terms of English. Furthermore, the outside environment, the area in which the school is situated, is, usually, intensely Anglicised.

It is an important feature of bilingualism, from the linguistic point of view, and one that deserves close attention that there are situations in which the use of Gaelic by anyone has a very low probability. There is, for example, the obvious case of most technical discussion; but there are less obvious ones, for instance the register of buying and selling. One has only to linger in any shop in the bilingual area to discover that

the English content of this register is, in general, quite extraordinarily high; the highest being probably in the counting out of money.

The importance of this from the educational point of view is that one of the typical situations in which Gaelic was very seldom used was the classroom situation, for changes in legislation and changes of general attitude were not paralleled by changes in practice, in spite of the fact that Gaelic-speaking teachers returned to work in Gaelic areas. The apparent lack of damage that this inflicts on the Gaelic of children in Primary schools is no more than a testimony to the strength of the language in home and community. But in fact there is real damage done in the attitudes set up in the child which lead him to compartmentalise his use of Gaelic and stunts his growth in ability to handle it productively. One of the most urgent remedial tasks to be undertaken in the teaching of Gaelic is the gradual educating of the child in the ability to use the language in any situation.

In order to effect this several things are needed. Of these one may mention one or two. First of all it must be realised that the inadequacy to deal with certain situations is not an inherent feature of the language: it must be regarded as a "living language" and productive. Then a clear-cut decision is needed to set up a teaching programme and to implement it. One is happy to be able to say that in the most important Gaelic areas steps have been taken and are being taken to set up a practice of teaching children whose first language is Gaelic to read and write it as a first language and to be taught in Primary schools through the medium of Gaelic.

It is essential that a programme such as this should be based on the best available, relevant scientific knowledge. The value of the book under review is that it provides a basic portion of this.

DONALD MACAULAY

The Court Book of Orkney and Shetland 1612-1613. Transcribed and edited by Robert S. Barclay, B.Sc., Ph.D., F.R.S.E. W. R. Mackintosh, The Kirkwall Press. 1962 (also obtainable from John Grant, Booksellers, 31 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh). 104 pp. Five facsimiles. 15s.

Dr. Barclay's book is a scholarly, serviceable and interesting addition to the printed historical records of Orkney in the early seventeenth century.

For this period Orkney, like Shetland, has a remarkable collection of sources—still not yet fully exploited—including rentals, sasines, dispositions, state and ecclesiastical papers, parish registers, family papers, court records, and various maps and topographical notes. A considerable amount of this material is in print, including the first of the two “Court Books” of Shetland (1602-04) edited by Prof. Gordon Donaldson for the Scottish Record Society in 1954. Now, through the enterprise and diligence of Dr. Barclay and the Kirkwall Press we have in full the first of the four Orkney Court Books, covering the period 1612-13, transcribed from the manuscript in the Scottish Record Office.

Dr. Barclay’s Introduction, written with admirable lucidity for both the general reader and the specialist, explains the circumstances in which the Court Book was written. As the result of representations by Bishop Law of Orkney, the rapacious Earl Patrick Stewart was imprisoned in Edinburgh in 1609 and brought to trial. The earldom lands were once again vested in the crown, the Old Norse law was replaced by the law of Scotland, and the Bishop took over the functions of the Sheriff that had been exercised by the earl.

The Court Book begins with a sitting of the Sheriff Court under the Bishop in the Cathedral Church of St. Magnus on 30 July 1612. Four bailies were appointed, and eight counsellors and assessors—all of them, it may be noted, with Lowland Scots names.

Then several “country Acts” were passed. The first had the object of “keiping of ane civile societie . . . and repressing of all enormiteis and extortiounis” on mercat day. The second was to empower the bailies to fine “drukin men . . . and gif they have no geir to punisch thame in thair persones”.

The rest of the Court Book is a clerk’s record of the sittings, two in Shetland and the remainder in Kirkwall, until 1 May 1613. In Kirkwall the Court usually sat in the great hall of the Bishop’s Palace.

A few other country Acts appear, about control of beggars and of swine, about price-fixing of incoming cargoes and maintaining the supply of servants, about theft, the surreptitious rooing of sheep and borrowing other men’s horses without leave and cutting their tails.

Most of the sittings, however, deal with actual cases, both civil and criminal, the line of demarcation not being always clear. There is assault (blood often being drawn, according to

the record, "in great quantity"), trespass, bad debts, theft from the mill, and complicated disputes about land.

Assault or the fear of it seems to have been frequent. On p. 31 we read:

"The quhilk day James Peirsone, cowper, and Magnus Hardie, cordiner, burgessis of Kirkwall, becom cautioneris, souerteis and lawborrowis for Johne Morriell, carpentar, that Johne Drever, mariner, his wyff, bairnis . . . sall be harmeles and skaithles . . . be the said Johne Morriell . . . under pane of twa hundreth pundis . . ."

Undertakings to act as cautioners or "lawborrowis" occur every week or two in this way.

Much more lively, however, is a long case in which Thomas Setter, smith, Kirkwall, accused two timmermen in the town of damaging "ane new sex oring boit worth fiftie merkis". There is also a pertinacious Alexander Miller, possessor of the two-pennyland of Caldaill near Kirkwall, who successfully sued fifteen of his neighbours for allowing, and indeed encouraging, their bestial to trespass on his land and eat his corn.

The editor has carried over into record study the thoroughness which has already distinguished his work in demography. His very considerable labours in preparing the text will be still further rewarded when the remaining three manuscripts have been transcribed in full. (He has already begun on the period 1614-15.) In itself, the present volume is a useful source for a variety of studies: the jurisdiction and procedure of the Sheriff Court and its position in the north of Scotland at the time; local law; social history (although here the first Shetland Court Book is more informative); family history; personal names; language. Mention of the last is prompted by the fascination of the pithy Scots legal phraseology of this and other court records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—semi-professional, but never far from the mill, the stable, and the mercat cross; it provides some interesting material for the social history of language.

In any future transcripts of this kind, it would be useful if the glossary and the index of proper names were supplemented by a subject index; and also by an index of cases to assist in tracing the individual case from one sitting to another.

The book has a handsome cover and a well-designed jacket. It has also the distinction of having first appeared in serial form in Orkney's weekly newspaper *The Orcadian*.

A. B. TAYLOR

Sword Dance and Drama. By Violet Alford. London: Merlin Press. 1962. 222 pp. 30s.

The Sword dances which form the subject of this book are seasonal ritual dances, performed (properly) by men only, with the common characteristic that the dancers are linked by swords or suitable substitutes to form a closed ring—when the links are swords each dancer holds the hilt of his own sword in one hand and the point of his neighbour's sword in the other, giving rise to the generic name "hilt-and-point Sword dance" by which such dances are best known. The rites with which the hilt-and-point Sword dances are associated were primarily agricultural, and belonged to Midwinter, Spring, and early Summer. In the Germanic countries the dances were often performed by the Trade Guilds of the cities, but even in the cities the dances retained their seasonal character.

The best-known example of such a dance in Scotland, and the only one still extant, is the Sword Dance of Papa Stour, which was first recorded in print by Sir Walter Scott in *The Pirate* (though Sir Walter himself did not *see* the dance performed, as stated by Miss Alford). Scotland also once had a Guild example, which was performed by the Glovers' Guild of Perth before James I in 1633; this dance is now lost, but one of the costumes survives, and Miss Alford has included a sketch of it, from the original in Perth Museum.

The major portion of Miss Alford's book is devoted to a survey of the Sword dances of Europe and their associated folk-drama, based on written records and on the author's wide personal experience of traditional dancing "in its natural haunts". The survey provides for the first time a comprehensive and well-documented account of hilt-and-point Sword dances over the whole of their European range, and should be of considerable value in any discussion of the origin of these dances.

Miss Alford's own theory of the origin of the hilt-and-point dances is discussed briefly in the first part of the book. The fundamental dance-element in the dances, the closed chain, was known before the age of metal, and the use of a chain dance in agricultural rites is therefore deemed to have preceded the use of a sword dance. When metal was first discovered, its own apparently magical quality conferred a semi-magical status on those who worked it, and it is suggested that in metal-working areas the places of the custodians of the earlier agricultural rites were gradually usurped by the metal workers,

who brought the sword, the symbol of their craft, into the chain dance with them. This theory suggests in turn that hilt-and-point Sword dances should occur predominantly in areas which were prehistoric mining sites, and Miss Alford has succeeded in showing that a fair proportion of the dances do so occur. Unfortunately she gives no authorities for her identification of early mining sites, and the further omission of a reasonably complete list of such sites prevents any real assessment of the significance of her results.

Scotland receives a comparatively brief mention in the book, for definite records of hilt-and-point Sword dances are rare in Scotland. Miss Alford quotes four, from Edinburgh, Perth, Elgin, and Papa Stour. That from Perth is the Glovers' Guild dance already mentioned, and here it is a pity that Miss Alford should have reproduced one of the inaccurate transcripts from the original minute of 1633 in the Glovers' Book, all the more so since the original is given by A. J. Mill (A. J. Mill 1927), whom Miss Alford quotes on other topics. The Edinburgh dance was performed on the entry of Anne of Denmark to Edinburgh in 1590 and may also have been a Guild dance; the record from Elgin refers to a Sword dance done by five men in the churchyard in 1623, and the other record refers, of course, to the still extant Papa Stour dance.

In his *Sword Dances of Northern England* (Sharp 1911-13), Cecil Sharp added Fife and the Hebrides to the list of places in Scotland where hilt-and-point Sword dances occurred, but the reviewer has so far been unable to find his authority for these statements, though it is possible that the Hebridean record referred to the now lost "Cath nan curaidh", the "Contest of the warriors" mentioned in *Carmina Gadelica* (Carmichael 1900). A. J. Mill (*op. cit.*) states that Sword dances were once widespread over Scotland, but in the absence of supporting evidence the statement seems extremely unlikely, and it is an intriguing question why Scotland should possess the very few scattered examples which have been authenticated.

Another question of interest to Scottish readers concerns the status of the solo Sword dance Gille Callum, and Miss Alford discusses the possibility that it is a relic of some much larger ritual dance of hilt-and-point type. As a possible connecting link she quotes an elaborate Sword dance seen in Scotland about 1880 by a London resident and described by him in a letter to the English Folk Dance Society in 1924. Miss Alford comments that she only half believes the letter, and on

the several other occasions when the letter has been quoted the conclusion is always reached that the writer's description of the dance is too vague to permit of any conclusion. It is to be regretted that when the letter was received some member of the English Folk Dance Society did not walk round to interview the writer!

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T. M. FLETT

The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction. By Terence Martin. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1961. x+197 pp. \$4.50.

Professor Martin's book is a detailed and carefully worked out investigation into the nature and extent of the influence exerted by Scottish Common Sense philosophy in America. Introduced by John Witherspoon, a Scottish Presbyterian minister who became President of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) in 1768, the body of thought expounded by Thomas Reid, and developed by his disciples Dugald Stewart, Lord Kames, Thomas Brown, and others, grew in America to enjoy a greater importance than in Scotland itself. Admirably suited for the practical needs of the early United States in its safe, stabilising, and conservative spirit, and the cohesive force it could bring to bear on a young society, Common Sense philosophy extended its influence into the spheres of American philosophy, theology, psychology, education, aesthetics—indeed, throughout the whole of early American culture in its formative stages. The author demonstrates how this was effected, first through the colleges and universities, and then, in consequence, among the clergymen, educators, politicians, men of law, critics, and writers of America. He is careful throughout to present concrete evidence of specific connections and influences.

As a student of American literature, however, Professor Martin's primary concern is with the effect of the Scottish philosophy on the writing of fiction in the early United States.

The metaphysics of the Common Sense school, basically and fundamentally anti-idealistic, posited an epistemological hierarchy in which the realm of the actual (equated with the real) had precedence over the realm of the possible. The imagination, as the faculty of the possible, was looked upon as dangerously disengaged from the actual, and therefore in need of strong control. Consequently fiction, a product of the imagination, was equally suspect as being likely to alienate those who indulged in its pleasures from the real world in which they had to live their lives—a doctrine not unfamiliar in our own time. Thus, Dugald Stewart could write, “The effect of novels, in misleading the passions of youth, with respect to the most interesting and most important relations, is one of the many instances of the inconveniences resulting from an ill-regulated imagination.”

Against such an intellectual background, as the author goes on to demonstrate, any attempt at writing fiction was foredoomed to failure. Writers were reduced to producing almost pathetic and laughable compromises. It was only after decades of domination by the artistically stultifying Scottish philosophy, that the field was ripe for the new idealism of the English Romantics and Transcendentalists. Under their aegis, the imagination was elevated once more, and, because of the terms in which the metaphysical polemic between them and the advocates of Scottish Common Sense philosophy was framed, American writers of fiction turned precisely to that disengaged imaginative experience which, though damned in the order of the Scots, was the very essence of romance as a literary genre. From the 1830's, and the works of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, the mode of romance constituted a steady, even dominant, current in American literature even to the present day. In elucidating one of the most important factors in the background of this development, Professor Martin has made a valuable contribution both to the history of ideas and to the study of American literature.

RICHARD BAUMAN

Dr. Walton's "Population Changes in North-East Scotland"

Sir,

I have been puzzling over some of the figures given by Dr. Walton in your journal for January, 1962, and I think some corrections should be made to his conclusions. There are

considerable difficulties in the way of accepting Poll Tax records for population purposes, even when they are as full as those for Aberdeenshire in 1696, but if these are used care must be taken in adjusting them to include the untaxed section of the population. Dr. Walton has accepted Dr. Webster's age pattern for 1755 and his addition of two-ninths to the population over 6 to give the total population. He then makes his own allowance of one third to the 1696 return of taxable persons (those over 16 and not receiving poor relief), for the total for that year. If Dr. Webster's figures have any validity this is far too small an addition for the age group 6 to 16. It can be worked out that this decade would contain only three forty-fourths of the total population, which would mean either that this age group and this one alone had suffered a demographic disaster to reduce it far below older portions of the population, or that the expectation of life for those who attained the age of 6 was 125. There seems no historical reason for either situation.

Is there in fact any reason to disagree with Dr. Webster's own age pattern? For the years 6 to 16 it is based on an actual count. If his figures for the years 0 to 16 are added up they come to nearly three-eighths of the total population, and the ratio of this age group to that over 16 is approximately 62 to 100. This is nearly twice Dr. Walton's ratio of 1 to 3, and accepting this higher ratio would have a drastic effect on estimates for the population as a whole. It would add approximately 21.5 per cent to his total. If any allowance is to be made for paupers, the increase would have to be still greater, but as I know of no statistical basis from which such an allowance can be derived, I cannot assess this further increase.

The importance of altering Dr. Walton's adjustments to bring them into line with a population such as Dr. Webster's is to be seen in his population map. All his percentage increases would have to be dropped by more than 20 per cent. Parishes for which he claims an increase of up to 25 per cent would then have very little increase at all, or may have decreased considerably, and the whole pattern of population change as he sees it must be drastically changed.

Yours, etc.
ROSALIND MITCHISON