Book Reviews

The Blind Harper (*An Clarsair Dall*): *The Songs of Roderick Morison and his Music*, edited by William Matheson. Scottish Gaelic Texts Society (volume 12), Edinburgh 1970. Pp. lxxvi+265. 55s.

An Clàrsair Dall (Ruaidhri Mac Mhuirich or Morison) is one of the better-known names of Gaelic poets in the period around 1700, yet few have hitherto had any clear idea of his life and social position, or any reliable knowledge of his dates. Information about him has been even more confused than information about other poets of his time, partly because his work (as we have it) marks him mainly as a poet, while his name marks him as a harper, and partly because he has long been confused in Scottish and Irish minds with Ruairí Dall Ó Catháin, an Irish harper who spent most of his life in Scotland.

In editing the seven remaining poems which can safely be ascribed to the Blind Harper, Mr Matheson has expanded the book with an exhaustive biographical Introduction, bibliography, list of variant readings, notes, airs, seven appendices on the life, work, genealogy and kinsfolk of the harper, and three indexes, in addition to the 76 pages of text and face-to-face English translation.

The Introduction presents a tremendous amount of new detail on the poet's life: his birth is placed at about 1656, without much evidence (it could be 1660 or even later), and his death is tidily fixed at 1713 or 1714. One of the most interesting points is the account of the 'Talisker circle' of poets, which included *An Clàrsair Dall* and at least three other major poets of his time.

If the poems themselves are few, they compensate considerably by their length, the shortest having 12 stanzas, the longest 28. The four poems on the MacLeods show a devotion to a particular family similar to that evidenced in the work of Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh and Iain Lom, and show the same marvellous facility with words and rhythm that these poets had. The famous song to Roderick of Dunvegan (the popular name for which, *Òran Mór Mhic Leòid*, Mr Matheson considers misleading) seems to me to deserve well its position as the harper's most popular song, because of the very effective use (one of the few uses in this period) of the poetic device which gives the poem its setting: the poet laments the passing of better days by the use of a conversation, in this case between himself and Echo (*mac-alla*, easily personified in Gaelic), both now silenced at Dunvegan. This is reminiscent of *Òran na Comhachaig* (*c.* 1600), where an owl tells the poet about the past, but the only similar idea I know of in the harper's period is in *Cumha Choire 'n Easa* by *Am Pìobaire Dall*, where the personified corrie converses with the poet: this poem may well be later than the harper's.

A fifth poem (*Féill nan Cramn*) is a burlesque in which the poet mocks the fuss created by the ladies at Dunvegan when he lost his harp-key in the ashes: a rather protracted and, to us, overworked piece of froth containing some rather underworked *double entendre* and many jokes which were probably in-jokes even when the poem was composed. Five of the 15 verses are here published for the first time. A sixth poem (*A' Cheud Di-luain de'n Ràithe*) expresses the poet's fear of having his cattle lifted from his farm at Glenelg, and in traditional style he praises the bravery and nobility of the potential raiders (the list is interesting)—they would not lift a blind man's cattle, he hopes. The seventh poem (*Òran mu Oifigich Àraid*) has not hitherto been recognised as the work of *An Clàrsair Dall*, and occurs only in the contemporary Fernaig manuscript. The editor argues convincingly for its inclusion, yet it stands out among the other extant poems as being the only clearly political one (it deals with the Killiecrankie period).

These seven poems cannot be the only ones composed by *An Clàrsair Dall*—almost certainly many of his poems have been lost. Yet they give a picture, with the aid of the editor's commentary, of a man who was part of the Gaelic tradition ('Gaelic Scotland's last minstrel' Mr Matheson calls him) at a time when that tradition was beginning to suffer severely from a long series of attacks which, in the end, it could not survive. We see a man born into a family of the old *aos dàna*, forced by blindness to resort to the trade of harper and to consort with travelling minstrels he despised and hated; saved from this insecure life by Iain Breac of Dunvegan and ever grateful for his salvation; concerned, apparently, with the cause of the old Stuart dynasty to a greater extent than his master was; deeply hurt and disappointed at being sent off to the edge of his master's estate, and fearful of attack there, unprotected as he was. We see a poet keen to compose for his master and to be an unofficial poet to him; ready to scold, as poets had always been, when the occasion arose, especially when he found the master turning his back on traditional ways and aping the English; not puritanical in regard to bawdry, either in invective or in buffoonery; one who followed the age-old paths of poet and harper from the house of one nobleman to that of another. Perhaps the fondness he has for quoting proverbs, noted by Mr Matheson, is yet another effect of the importance he attached to things traditional.

The Notes are full and detailed, and include gems of information which we might not expect to find there, such as an important discussion of early MacLeod genealogies (pp. 107–9). The note on line 785 remarks on the form *cathair* (confirmed by the rhyme) for *còir*; an interesting survival, as the editor remarks, of the poetic doublet *càir*, but perhaps also a survival of the original disyllabic nature of this word (see *RIA Contributions, s.v. cóir*).

In his discussion of the Airs and Metres for the poems, Mr Matheson puts forward the theory that the three main metrical types in Gaelic verse were the respective provinces of three distinct types of poet who still existed in the seventeenth century: syllabic verse composed by the old *filid* or professional poets; stressed verse in asym-

metrical stanzas composed by the old *baird*, the lesser poets of the old Gaelic world; and a new type of stressed verse in symmetrical four-line or eight-line stanzas composed, mainly to be sung, by people like *An Clàrsair Dall* who did not aspire even to the office of bard. This theory, though it may seem somewhat simplistic thus stated, might explain in particular some of the differences between Irish and Scottish poetry at this time, and we look forward with interest to the promised (p. 149) appearance of the editor's more detailed discussion of it.

Dealing with the harper's instrumental work, Mr Matheson gives four tunes ascribed to 'Rorie Dall' and makes a good case for considering them the work of *An Clàrsair Dall*. The evidence for this, for suggesting that they are not the work of Ruairí Dall Ó Catháin, who has other tunes extant, is rather sparse (to a jaundiced Ulster eye) and, as Mr Matheson says, 'the question cannot be decided for certain': to say (p. lxxvi) that these tunes are '*probably* to be ascribed to the Blind Harper' is therefore perhaps a bit strong.

It is hard for a reviewer to fault this work of scholarship, and he can only carp at minor points:

p. xxix: in the Table of Sources the page-number '103' should be entered under *E* opposite 'Oran do Mhac Leòid'.

p. xxxvi: the date of Tytler's account of '*Rory* or *Roderick Dall*' (footnote 1) is 1783, when it was first published with his *Poetical Remains of James the First* (see p. 222 there).

p. li: the derivation of the surname *MacAndy* from the name *Andadh*, which the editor notes from the Annals of Tigernach in the twelfth century (footnote 1), must be questioned on the grounds that the *-nd-* of Middle Irish might be expected to give *-nn-* in Modern Gaelic. Indeed, this *Andadh* seems likely to be the basis of the surnames *Ó hAnnaidh* and *Mac Annaidh*, which, according to Edward MacLysaght (*More Irish Families*, Galway, 1960, pp. 134, 48), underlie respectively the Galloway names *Hanna* and *Hannay*, and the Irish names *MacCanny* and *Canny*.

p. liv: it seems possible that in the poem given here (whatever the manuscript, or John Mackenzie in his *Sar-Obair*, may say) the quotation marks in the last line should be omitted. The poem would thus end:

gun fios nach cinneadh fo mheuraibh
deuchainn-ghleusda Mhic O Charmaig.

Deuchainn-ghleusda, as Mr Matheson points out, is a common noun. The effect would then be that the poet fears, not that the harper might play a particular harmful tune, but simply that he might use his music as Mac O Charmaig had, that is, as an aid to treachery.

p. lxviii: the suggestion that *An Clàrsair Dall* visited the house of MacKenzie of Coul is reasonably well based, but one pointer against the argument should be noted.

The family of Coul was very closely related to that of Applecross, and the poem by Murdoch Matheson quoted here, mentioning 'An Clàrsair', is addressed to a member of the Applecross family. As it happens, this family is known through other poems to have been highly praised by a harper in the seventeenth century. One such poem is by Lachlann Mac Theàrlaich Òig (Watson, *Bardachd Ghaidhlig*, line 3967), and Mackenzie (*Sar-Obair*, pp. 81–82n.) names the harper in this case as Cailean Cormac. In another poem (MacLagan MS 135B, by Brian, the Assynt bard, on Iain Molach, 2nd of Applecross) the chief is said to have been highly praised by the Earl of Antrim's harper. It is quite possible that the same harper is referred to in all these three poems, and that the note identifying the harper with *An Clàrsair Dall* in the case of Murdoch Matheson's poem is not reliably based.

p. 26: what a pity that the word *bod* (line 351) cannot even yet be printed!

p. 60: surely the form *chunnaigheas* (line 819) is not sufficiently well attested merely by its occurrence in the Turner MS, and ought to be altered to *chunnaigeas*?

p. 95: through the good offices of Dr C. Bruce Fergusson, Provincial Archivist for Nova Scotia, I have managed to get a copy of pp. 190–1 of John Maclean's manuscript of *c.* 1815. For the record, the beginning of *Oran do Iain Breac Mac Leòid* in this (p. 191) is as follows:

Oran do dh Iain Breachd Mach Leoid, le Ruairi Machd Mhuirich. [a later hand, that of the Reverend A. Maclean Sinclair, I think, changes the full stop to a comma and adds: An clarsair Dall See Sar obair nam Bard, Page 72]

Tha moran moran mulaid,
An deigh tuinneach am choum,
'S bliadhna leum gach Sheachdain,
O' nach fachda mi Iain dòunn,
N'a'n cluinnin fhein s'gu faichdin,
Fear do phearsa thine do 'n fhounn,
Gu sgaoladh mo ramh s'm airsdeal,
Mar shneachd oag ri aitebh thruim.

No chorus is given.

p. 142: the suggestion (note 949) that the word *mart*, 'cow', is derived from the word *Martinmas* can hardly be sustained. The long history of the word in Gaelic makes it impossible not to accept rather the derivations offered in the *RIA Contributions*: from Latin *mortuus*, or from Early Irish *mart*, 'a dead body'.

These little points, however, do not detract from the enormous success of this account of the poet's life and work. A scholarly work indeed, but a book which this reviewer could not put down once he had started it—Mr Matheson may be interested to know that only detective stories normally have this effect.

COLM Ó BAOILL

Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String: A History of Scottish Dance Music by George S. Emmerson. Dent, London 1971. Pp. 278+35 plates. £5.

This is a finely produced book, containing many illustrations, over 100 music examples, a list of manuscript collections and their contents, a bibliography of reference books and printed collections of Scottish music, an index of tunes and a general index. Written by a Scotsman (now a professor of engineering in Canada) who surveys his subject with enthusiasm and devotion, it includes songs, bagpipe and fiddle music, and puirt-a-beul.

The historical account, as distinct from musical, starts with Columba in the sixth century and ends with accordian bands in the twentieth century. The title of the book is brilliant and serves as a backcloth for a succession of memorable scena: of James the First, who was 'richt crafty in playing . . .'; of the town minstrels ('inebriation was the occupational disease of professional pipers and fiddlers'); of James Guthrie, the covenanting minister who left a manuscript of some 40 tunes behind him when he was executed; and of the flowering of eighteenth-century musical life alongside the universal popularity of dancing. From the Duchess of Gordon to the humblest country fiddler 'their chief amusement is dancing', and we can almost hear Neil Gow's shout as he changed from the strathspey to the reel.

The instruments associated with Scottish traditional dance music are considered, and the last chapter, 'The Sweetness of a Scottish Tune', deals adequately with modality and contributes some helpful insights into Scottish musical idiom.

In Chapter 7, 'The elements of Scottish traditional dance music', the author steps a sure-footed way through Scottish measures, past rants and reels, round the 'kindlan' bauld' strathspey and on to jigs and hornpipes. There is some slight difference between Emmerson and the Fletts (see *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*) concerning the terms 'single' and 'double' (as applied to jigs and hornpipes) and also on the basic characteristics of the Scottish, or 'Scotch', Measure, but their area of agreement is greater. All these kinds of dance tunes certainly exist but they tend to overlap, and the seeker after too-exact categories deserves to find more dusty answers than certainties. A most interesting metamorphosis is shown, on page 121, of a tune developing from a hornpipe in simple triple time to a jig in compound duple.

The author has evidently kept faith with his aim, as set out in the Preface, of approaching these tunes *as a dancer*. (This is the best way, and many of us might be all the better for a more physical approach to music in general.) His demonstration of the relationship between the 'Scotch Jig' of the eighteenth century and the Scottish Measure is most persuasive and thought-provoking, and I spent a happy half-hour turning 'The Campbells are Coming' into 'Mrs MacLeod of Raasay', and 'A Hundred Pipers and a' and a' ' into 'The White Cockade'.

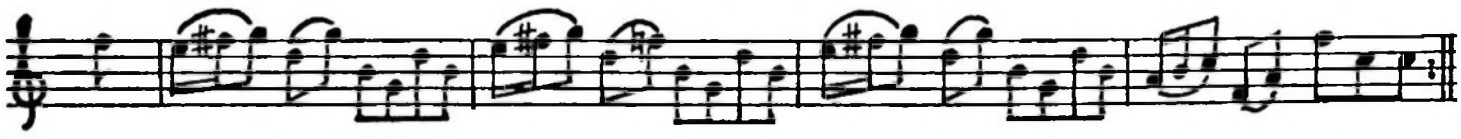
This perceptiveness of Emmerson's, musical as well as historical, makes the numerous technical mistakes in his music examples all the more inexplicable: they range from

notational slips to some howlers of wrong notes. (And these music examples contain many rich treasures—though surely it would have been better to give the second half of the beautiful 'Rory Dall's Port' instead of repeating the first half.) To the reader who is musically literate, who hears the tune 'in his mind's ear' as he scans the music, the wrong notes are obvious, either because they make musical nonsense, or because one knows the tune already, or because the notes contradict the same section of the tune elsewhere in the example. But what of the less musically knowledgeable reader?—for the preface explicitly states the aim, 'to serve the needs of the layman as well as the scholar'. He may copy the tunes, either to play himself or to pass on to others. It could be argued that, since it is traditional music, the players will soon correct the mistakes, in playing, and this would probably—although not necessarily—happen; but in any case, if you are going to print the tunes *and to quote the sources from which they were obtained*, then you must copy the notes faithfully and accurately.

It would be difficult to imagine a history of any branch of 'art-music'—or of jazz—with comparable mistakes in the music examples. Or, if a history of painting, or of poetry, contained illustrations full of distorted lines and colours or of butchered words, strong objections would certainly be raised by those who knew and cared about the paintings or poems concerned, *even if* these errors did not affect the truth and significance of the historical accounts and comments.

The omission of the sharp sign for notes C and F in the bagpipe scale on page 192 is clearly an unfortunate oversight. Then an otherwise adequate explanation of the facts of scordatura fiddle tuning runs into difficulties: in the second example on page 175 (which contains a thrice-repeated inconsistency in its transposition from the key of the first example) it would have been correct to change the key-signature to one sharp, to fit the key of G; and in the fourth example on this page to have one sharp again for the key-signature but to insert the C-sharp as an accidental in the last bar. But the mistakes in the tunes are less pardonable. Here are three examples (all checked from the sources given).

On page 134, tune [40], *Drummond's Rant* (from the Atholl Collection, 1884), bars 5 to 8 are shown as:



The last four notes of the second bar above (bar 6 of the whole tune) are a tone higher than the correct version: they should read

thus keeping to the double tonic pattern shown throughout the rest of the tune.

On page 148, tune [57], *The Auld Man's Mare's Deid* (from Robert Chambers's 'The Songs of Scotland prior to Burns', 1862), the second half of the tune is given as:

The third note of the second bar above should be F (sharp), establishing the double tonic again, not G as given. In the third bar above, the second last note should not be dotted: this is one of the notational errors. (Contrast Collinson, 'The Traditional and National Music of Scotland', p. 208, where the tune is given correctly.)

On page 156, tune [74], *Pibroch of Donuil Dhu* (from G. F. Graham's 'Songs of Scotland', 1864), the second four bars appear as:

The last note should obviously be E (flat), and is in fact so given at the corresponding point of the tune at the end of the first four bars.

Such mistakes are potentially more serious if the book containing them is in other respects scholarly and definitive, and such as to inspire the reader with confidence. Clearly then these strictures imply a considerable compliment to the author. In fact, not only has his book already proved invaluable for reference purposes but it is also interesting to read or to dip into, and above all it is a pioneer work which opens many doors to other researchers. For this Professor Emmerson deserves our sincere gratitude.

What about a second edition?

AILIE MUNRO

Directory of Former Scottish Commonties, edited by I. H. Adams. Scottish Record Society (New Series 2), Edinburgh 1971. Pp. xiii+281.

Dr I. H. Adams has already done a range of scholars significant service in editing the *Descriptive List of Plans in the Scottish Record Office*, Volumes I and II. This *Directory of Former Scottish Commonties* arises from his doctoral thesis, and although the editor is becomingly modest in his claims, and sees his Directory as an attempt to 'establish a foundation for an eventual bridge that will close the gap of knowledge of this system of land tenure in Scotland', it is as authoritative a list as can be presently presented of 'lands formerly used in co-ownership' or pastures used by several individuals, and records at least half a million acres of former commonties. It is conveniently arranged alphabetically by counties and by parishes within counties.

The completion of the Directory is described in the introduction and was a mammoth task, for there is no single basic source. The major sources used were the collection of estate plans in the Scottish Record Office and Court of Session documents relating to processes of division of the commonties. Other sources lay in the Signet Library and the National Library of Scotland; the School of Scottish Studies' subject index provided references as did the Ordnance Survey Object Name Books. Secondary sources used were the Old and New Statistical Accounts, the early nineteenth-century *General Views* of Agriculture, parish histories and the Municipal Corporations Report of 1835 relating to burghal commons.

The parish entries, located by National Grid reference and with sources noted, provide many details of intrinsic interest and ideas for further research. In New Deer parish, two farms bear the name of North Commonty and Commonty—did the former commonties simply become two farms? The future of 52 acres of Ayr Burgh Common was different: by 1792 it had become a race-course. Glenlivet common pasture was still an undivided common in 1836—one wonders how it is operated at present. A seventeen-acre common in the parish of Channelkirk, Berwickshire, first served as a drovers' resting place, but later was used by tinkers and other itinerants. In 1836 Dumbarton's burgesses had rights of pasturage on the 'town's common or Broad Meadow'. So commonties were still in use well into the nineteenth century.

Attempts by lairds to erode the practice of common usage, which legally they were entitled to do, and divide commons were on occasions met with violence: the editor records how two surveyors attempting to make a plan of the Common Muir of Aberlady in 1780 were met by an armed band of villagers, whose leaders found themselves 'in the Canongate Tolbooth for a month' as a result of their exertions. Less violent action on Alyth Common did not prevent its eventual division in 1792 after a dispute lasting 30 years.

There is a most useful 29-page index of commonties and persons. This Directory provides another important source for students of the Scottish landscape and additional information is being added, as it comes to light, to an interleaved copy of the Directory in the Historical Search Room of the Scottish Record Office.

JAMES B. CAIRD

A Bibliography on Vernacular Architecture, edited by R. de Z. Hall. Newton Abbot 1972. Pp. 191. £3.95.

This bibliography brings together the several lists of books on vernacular buildings published by the Vernacular Architecture Group since 1952. A substantial element relates to Scottish sources, and provides a basis for the future development of vernacular buildings' studies in this country.

The bibliography covers regional and local studies, rural buildings and dwelling houses, town buildings, construction and materials, and early and primitive building, as well as the economic and social background. Because of the breakdown within each section by themes and geographical regions, the bibliography is of equal service to the local researcher and to the one who is concerned with a wide view. In addition, brief comments expand and indicate the value of many of the entries.

The analytical layout of the entries which reduces the need for cross-references to a minimum, and the index of authors help to make this in many respects a model bibliography, whose deceptive simplicity of presentation conceals a great deal of thought and meticulous checking.

The *Bibliography on Vernacular Architecture* is doubly welcome. It performs a service to the growing subject of vernacular architecture, 'the study of houses and other buildings, which, in their form and materials, represent the unselfconscious tradition of a region rather than ideas of architectural style'. It provides, for the first time, a soundly organised basis for the development of the subject. In so providing sources for the pinpointing of regional identity, the bibliography also performs a service to British ethnology as a whole, and will be a necessary source book not only for all students and teachers concerned with academic aspects of the subject, but also practising architects and local planners whose concern is or should be with the recording, surveying, and, on this basis, selective preservation of vernacular buildings that reflect regional character and show better than any other artifact what makes one area different from its neighbour.

ALEXANDER FENTON

Books Received

Scotland. Church and Nation through Sixteen Centuries by Gordon Donaldson. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1972 (2nd edn.; 1st edn. S.C.M. Press 1960). Pp. 128. £1.50.

I Presume: H. M. Stanley's Triumph and Disaster by Ian Anstruther. Geoffrey Bles, London 1973 (reissued; 1st edn. 1956). Pp. 207. £2.25.

Neil M. Gunn. The Man and the Writer, edited by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford. William Blackwood, Edinburgh and London 1973. Pp. 400. £4.

Over the Sea to Skye by John Selby. Hamish Hamilton, London 1973. Pp. 170. 10 colour illustrations, 51 black and white. £3.90.

New Ways through the Glens: Highland Road, Bridge and Canal Makers of the Early 19th Century by A. R. B. Haldane. David & Charles, Newton Abbot 1973 (new edn.; 1st edn. 1962). Pp. 247. £3.50.

The Various Names of Shetland by Alexander Fenton. Alexander Fenton, Edinburgh 1973. Pp. 24. 25p.

The Victorians and Social Protest: A Symposium, edited by J. Butt and I. F. Clarke. David & Charles, Newton Abbot, and The Shoe String Press, Hamden, Connecticut 1973. Pp. 243. £4.25.

Education in Scotland by Ian R. Findlay (*World Education* Series). David & Charles, Newton Abbot 1973. Pp. 143. £2.75.

The English Farm Wagon: Origins and Structure by J. Geraint Jenkins. David & Charles, Newton Abbot 1973 (new edn.; 1st edn. 1961). Pp. 250. £3.50.

The Leviathan of Wealth: The Sutherland Fortune in the Industrial Revolution by Eric Richards (*Studies in Social History*, edited by Harold Perkin). Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, and University of Toronto Press, 1973. Pp. 316. 58 illustrations. £5.25.

Ancient & Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads &c, collected by David Herd. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh and London 1973. 2 vols. Pp. 312 and 360. £5 per set.