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STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

John Gibson Lockhart. *Adam Blair*. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press. 1963. xxv + 287pp. 15 shillings.

The publication of Lockhart's *Adam Blair* as the first in a projected series of reprintings of Scottish works makes available a significant novel by an author who is best known as biographer of Sir Walter Scott and editor of the *Quarterly Review*. In *Adam Blair*, Lockhart treated with quiet compassion a specific instance of the conflict between the spirit and the flesh. The plot may be outlined simply: The Reverend Adam Blair, grieved by the loss of his wife, commits adultery with Mrs. Charlotte Campbell and is conscience stricken. Mrs. Campbell dies from a fever; Adam Blair resigns his position as minister and with his daughter Sarah retires to live on a small isolated farm. There for a number of years as he earns his living he avoids his friends and former parishioners. His days are spent tilling the fields; his evenings in teaching his daughter. On Sundays he and Sarah sit apart from the others of the congregation to which Blair was once minister. Finally, in deference to the dying wishes of an old friend, the Reverend Dr. Muir, Blair agrees to perform the ritual of burial for him. Shortly thereafter a committee of elders from Blair's church asks him to resume his post as minister. Blair agrees to their request and finishes out his life as a gentle shepherd to the flock from which his sin had once set him apart.

So bare an outline can merely suggest the theological framework around which Lockhart constructed his novel, yet the movement is clear: from sin to public acknowledgment of sin, to repentance and forgiveness—at least to forgiveness by fellow mortals. In using the career of Adam Blair as the focal point for depiction of this movement, Lockhart drew heavily upon his knowledge of the stern morality of Scotch Presbyterianism. So rigidly is Adam Blair an adherent to this moral code that the torment of his own conscience is greater than any torment caused by condemnations his parishioners might have uttered against him. The greatest strength of *Adam Blair* as a novel is the presentation it offers of an individual's awareness of his weaknesses and of his sense of guilt at having failed to live up to what he had believed to be his best self. Lockhart succeeded admirably in presenting Adam Blair's struggle to forgive himself so that he could hope for forgiveness from God and from his fellow human beings.

Less successful is Lockhart's characterization of Charlotte Campbell. She is supposed to be a woman whose unhappy marriages have caused her to despair of love and/or honor until she can win Adam Blair. But as a

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character she is never as fully realized as are two relatively minor characters who are presented with true artistic economy. John Maxwell, Adam Blair's devoted friend and an elder in Cross-Meikle Kirk, emerges as a living character of whose creation Walter Scott or Charles Dickens could have been proud. Mrs. Semple, likewise, is vividly presented as an example of the good that Lockhart evidently saw in some of the rural aristocracy of Scotland.

Despite some weaknesses in characterization and a certain awkwardness in plotting, *Adam Blair* is a significant work which merits the competent reprinting it has received by the University of Edinburgh Press. Its emphasis on the conflict between flesh and spirit brought about in part by a Puritan ethic places it early in a long series of nineteenth century novels which dealt with similar conflicts. Not all of the successors to *Adam Blair* are marked by the same type of balanced sympathy of which Lockhart was capable.

The present edition is enhanced by Dr. David Craig's perceptive introduction which establishes the background against which *Adam Blair* must be placed for fullest appreciation.

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