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Christiane Agricola (ed.). Schotische Sagem. (Vol. V of Europäische Sagem, ed. by Will-Erich Peuckert). Berlin. Erich Schmidt Verlag. 1967. 325 pp. DM 39.-

Kurt Wittig

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STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Christiane Agricola (ed.). *Schottische Sagen*. (Vol. V of *Europäische Sagen*, ed. by Will-Erich Peuckert). Berlin. Erich Schmidt Verlag. 1967. 325 pp. DM 39.-

In accordance with the general policy of this *Europäische Sagen* series, *Schottische Sagen* is a translation of legends and tales, collected from some periodicals, but also from a dozen or so books¹, all of the venerable 19th century, when diligent local worthies collected these tales of peasant superstition before they were forgotten. No book published since 1902 seems to have been consulted, though — to mention one recent publication — Otta F. Swire, *The Highlands and Their Legends* (Edinburgh & London, 1963) — offers much finer material in a congenial setting. For the tales in *Schottische Sagen* just give us the bare bones; there is no background, nothing of the *genius loci*, and in this way the tales lose more than half their charm.

The title *Sagen* is misleading, for many items are simple tales of superstition and ghosts; thus, the headings of the different parts of the book are "Second Sight," "Spook," "Wraiths," "Death and Apparitions," "Black Magic," etc. The tales are followed by copious notes, by a list of sources, a placename register and a general register of motifs and themes. These two registers are so inaccurate and faulty as to be almost useless, especially that of placenames: what is one to say of Loch Lomond in Dumfries, or Stonehaven (the county town of Kincardine) in Forfarshire, or of Locheilside as a town, etc.?

The main purpose of the book seems to be to find parallels for various motifs such as "the devil as a black dog," "music in the church at night," "no footprints," "apparition of a skull," "green hair." These motifs are traced to the four corners of the earth in more than 70 pp. of notes — but poor old Scotland is completely forgotten in this treasure hunt and anything Scottish goes by the board. No effort is made to group according to Highlands and Lowlands; the speaking names (which were so obvious to the original audience) such as Strike Martin, Baldragon, Norrie's Law² are not translated and thus make quite a few of the tales unintelligible; Scottish historical events or connections, so essential to the full understanding, are not explained, such as the Appin

¹The standard work, J. F. Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1860-2) has not been included, since it is more easily available everywhere.

²Cf. *SND* "law."

REVIEWS

murder in connection with James Stewart of the Glens, "open hills," Culloden and the 'Forty-Five, etc. Light in the church at night means the devil is doing his work there (26) —but not a word of Burns's *Tam O' Shanter*, nor of his *Halloween*, when "pulling a stock of kail" on that night is mentioned. What is a German reader to understand by a "cairn," by "Nickie," by "die Insel-Hagar"? Does the editor realize that "Nic Ghriogair" is the same as "the MacGregor woman" in the same story? that Colum-Cille is Columba of another story? If the new year, in one tale, is celebrated for eleven days — isn't that just the eleven-day difference between the old and new calendars?³ Why is there not a word about "Brutus' invasion" — I hope we are not to understand Brutus as Caesar's assassin? Fion and the Fians should have a full explanation, especially since, in the introduction, Macpherson's *Ossian* seems to be taken more or less at face value. The translation, too, leaves much to be desired, though acknowledgments are made to the editor of *SND*: no German in his right mind could understand "eine Pinte nehmen," unless he knew the English "to take a pint"; a "pool at a waterfall" is not a "Teich" (pond); the Forest of Mar is a deer forest, not a forest in the meaning "wooded land."

It is hard to see who this book is meant for. The lover of ghosts and superstitions will find plenty of material — but he would be better served in a book like Otta F. Swire's, where the tale grows out of its scenic setting. The student of international folklore finds subject-matter galore, but he would need accuracy and completeness — and what is a collection of Scottish legends if Eildon Hill or Loch Maree are not even mentioned?

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³Cf. *SND* "June"