

4-1-1965

Otta F. Swire. *The Highlands and Their Legends*.
Edinburgh and London. Oliver & Boyd. 1963. viii +
290 pp. 30 shillings.

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Recommended Citation

Gunn, Alan M. F. (1964) "Otta F. Swire. *The Highlands and Their Legends*. Edinburgh and London. Oliver & Boyd. 1963. viii + 290 pp. 30 shillings.," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 2: Iss. 4, 259–259.
Available at: <http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol2/iss4/7>

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Reviews

Otta F. Swire. *The Highlands and Their Legends*. Edinburgh and London. Oliver & Boyd. 1963. viii + 290 pp. 30 shillings.

This pleasant, unpretending pilgrim's journey through the parishes of Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, and Sutherland, must leave in grateful indebtedness to Mrs. Swire all Highland men and women of the North and their kin and guests from the shires of the South and overseas. No solemn, pedantic contribution to the taxonomy of Scottish folklore is her "legendary." It is rather a joyous and yet often a saddening evocation of the tales of Northern Pict and Maormor and Celtic missionary and Jacobite and banished clansmen, of bard and prophet and witch and glaistic. Simple and even homely is Mrs. Swire's manner of relation; obvious—although surprisingly effective—is the "travelogue" mode of her narrative's progression. Yet one is moved from the opening account of her so justly lauded and beloved Inverness, by the intimacy of her knowledge of the North, her unaffected devotion to the land and its people, her fine balance of a primitive and poetic faith and a Scots-woman's canniness and clarity of vision. (This balance is perhaps only once disturbed, in a passage giving credence to certain donnish speculations concerning ties between the Pythagoreans and the Druids. See pp. 33-34. More credible and more creditable is the honor paid to the seer of Brahan and Strathpeffer and of all the North.)

Pleasantly and simply recounted and yet richly storied as is each stage in Mrs. Swire's pilgrimage, its greatest value is the distilled essence it offers, the afterglow it casts, of the long centuries of wonder and terror and courage, of piety and fidelity and betrayal, of cruelty and passion and love—which are the grand, the tragic, the heroic, yet all-too-human past of the now tourist-haunted burghs and lonely straths of the North.

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