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The Tail of Rauf Coileyar printed by Robert Lek-
prenik at St. Andrews in 1572: A facsimile of the only
known copy. With a bibliographical note by William
1966. xii + 32 pp. 25 shillings.

The Tail of Rauf Coileyar is here printed in facsimile from the
unique copy in the National Library of Scotland. It is a Scottish varia-
tion on a common theme: how a king, Charlemagne in this instance,
arrived incognito at the house of a subject, here Rauf, who by candour
and directness gave him a lesson in manners, and who, subsequently
meeting the king, was handsomely rewarded. This is an exceptionally
lively version. The opening hunt is economically passed through; in
fact, Rauf and the king meet in the fourth stanza. The following
twenty stanzas contain the substance of the poem: the brisk conversa-
tion between king and subject, largely dominated by Rauf. The only
minor characters of consequence, Rauf’s wife and Shir Rolland, are
sketches in firmly. The recognition is made, and Rauf becomes Shir
Rauf. The poem ends with an irrelevvent coda in which the new
knight proves himself against a Saracen—though the episode might
be defended as a demonstration that a collier can perform knightly
feats if he escapes his laborer’s role.

In all such poems there is an ambiguity. Do they speak for the
common man, asserting that he is as good as knight or king? Or, on the
other hand, are they, less sturdily, a kind of wish-fulfillment—“If only
I had a million dollars... or a knighthood...” The poem ends with
Rauf rich, and safely ensconced in the privileged class (though “his
wyfe wald he nocht foryet”). The poet, however, wrote with vigour
and directness, qualities that seem to fit an assertion that merit should
count, not rank, and less to fit a dream of luxury and splendour. But
a critical essay on the poem is no part of the present edition.

Facsimiles of early Scottish printing are few, and this is therefore
welcome. The collotype plates are clear and accurate. Reading from
sixteenth-century print, however, is subjective in part, as it is from
manuscripts. Poor type and poor paper do not produce certainty.
Rather subjectively, then, I would add the following misprints to Dr.
Beattie’s list:

3a 3, “wel cumto” should be “welcum to.”
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5b 16, "rid" should probably be "red" for the rime, though the poem has unrimed "rid" at 6a 7 and 14b 23.
5b 17, "aue" appears for "ane"; cf. "cunniug" at 3a 23.
10b 8, "busteouly" should be "busteously"—the reading seems to be "-fl-" in comparison with "dispittously" at 15a 4.
14a 15, "bakheir" is surely a misprint for "bak heir (i.e. here)" or "backer" or "backer here."

On the other hand, I am not sure of some of the misprints reported:
8b 24, "rewellis" should be kept for the alliteration, and taken as "clothes" (OED, towel, 2b).
9a 7, "vnder tak" can be kept: Rauf swears in the present that the coals should be brought.
10b 28, "Girt" seems to be a badly printed "Gif"; cf. "fundin" in the same line, "said" at 11a 9, "mesure" at 11a 29, "fyue" at 11a 31, and "furth" at that same line. It is almost impossible to distinguish c's, s's, and t's in some circumstances.
14b 19, "Cousingis" is possible, though rare, for "Cousingis," but at 15a 15 the reading is the more common "cusingis."

When Dr. Beattie does not mark a misprint, he probably accepts the reading. I believe rightly on 3a in stanza 7, "ruse," "behuse," and "excuse." The EETS edition reads "rufe," "behufe," and "excuse." The s's are necessary for the rime. "Roose" is a poetic word for "vaunt," "behuse" is the plural of "behuve," a variant of "behuis," and the choice of words was influenced by the common phrase "use and behuvis."

The book is labelled "Keppie Facsimiles No. 1"; it is to be hoped that it begins a long series of reprints of rare and unique items in Dr. Beattie's care.

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