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Reviews


Mr. Scott's "Selection" of Scottish poetry from _The Kingis Quair_ to that of the first decade of the seventeenth century is an attractive and valuable addition to _The Poetry Bookshelf_ series. Certainly, for presenting in convenient and accessible form a body of verse composition "superior to most poetry produced in England" from 1400 to the reign of Elizabeth—as its jacket not without justice declares—it is to be welcomed not only by readers of this journal but by all students of the literature of the time and indeed by all devotees of poetry. Its choice of poems and its editorial apparatus have been largely determined by the audience to which the whole series is addressed—one composed chiefly of general readers and of neophyte students of literature. In this instance, one may assume, Mr. Scott addresses also a more particular audience—one made up of the lay members of the worldwide Scottish community and of more advanced students of the literature, history, and culture of Scotland and its neighbors, whose acquaintance with the work of "the Makars" and their successors may be limited or lacking in recency.

Such an audience will find Mr. Scott's "Selection" to be not only a serviceable but a worthy and noble anthology. Specialists in Dunbar and Douglas, Henryson and Lyndsay, will no doubt enter exceptions to specific inclusions and omissions. Such exceptions and counterclams are inevitable, indeed necessary and fruitful, in the achievement of the enduring and sacred canon of any body of letters. It will still remain to Mr. Scott's honor to have been among the first to point to the "heart's core," the essential inner corpus of the work of "the Makars and their Heirs."

The editorial apparatus provided by Mr. Scott for the lay reader is, in his introduction at least, generous in its fullness and for the most
part useful in matters of detail. The degree of illumination it offers might indeed have been increased if he had limited his treatment of somewhat tangential issues and so made possible a considerable extension of his glossary and of his instructive commentary upon specific poems. The lay reader, one may guess, would also have welcomed marginal or footnote annotations and glosses. Admittedly, the use of such devices is not always under the control of the editor of an individual volume in a general series, in which considerations of utility must often be waived for those of uniformity and elegance of format. Of obvious usefulness are the more justly proportioned bibliographical and biographical notes and the observations upon "Some Features of Scots." (Yet it is curious that one so perceptive and informed should stigmatize Chaucer's language as 'bastard Anglo-Norman'!) Admirable also is Mr. Scott's exactitude — apart from some understandable transliterations of v's and u's — in adherence to his textual authorities.

The true and final purpose of the making and annotation of a canon, our editor would surely agree, is the realization and the communication of the canon's own distinctive essence, its inherent authority, the timeless relevance of its utterance. Mr. Scott exhibits fully the essential — if Lowland, non-Celtic — "Scottishness" of his poets. Although he by no means underestimates their great debt to Chaucer, he is able to demonstrate through his balancing emphasis upon general medieval and French influences and especially upon native and generic origins and traits, the inadequacy of their usual designation as "the Scottish Chaucerians." Yet to this reader at least, the members of Mr. Scott's anthology — whether drawn from The Kingis Quair, Dunbar, Douglas, Lyndsay, or their successors — in theme and mood and style and language still seem in great part to issue from and to voice the centuries-old and profoundly tragic yet often most fruitful tension between Scotland and her cousin-kingdom England.

The authority of "the Makars" as voices of Scotland and of humanity, no sensitive and informed reader needs to be told, derives from their integrity and their truth, their sense of their high role as members of the noble company of poets of the "Comoun Weill" of Scotland, their mastery of cadences ranging from the grave beauty of the satiric poems through the robust measures of the satires and the flytings to the simplicity, the intensity, of the laments and the threnodies.

Sadness is in truth a recurring mood of these Scots poets — as of all poets. It is one also, and for a variety of causes, evoked again and again in their readers. The contemplation of this canon, as of the
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canonical rolls of later periods of Scottish literature, must arouse in all
of Scottish blood the feeling of a profound historical pathos. Yet
justly weighed, the pathos of Scottish letters is not that of the unrealized,
the unfulfilled: it is rather that of a tragic national and human condition
confronted from Henryson through Burns and beyond to MacDiarmid
and his successors with dignity of spirit, firmness of mind, and often
too with merriment of heart. Witness for the poets of this earlier time,
out of a great company that might be summoned, Henryson's epitaph
for Cresseid, Dunbar's "Lament for the Makaris" and his less familiar
"Meditation in Wyntir," Lyndsay's "Complaynt of the Comoun Weill
of Scotland," Maitland's verses "On the New Yeir 1560"—verses all
that have relevance, and not only for lands "Scottis" and "Inglis," in our
own time of troubles. It is Mr. Scott's achievement, it is to his honor,
that through his pious endeavors we are able to hear once more the
voices of these strong witnesses.

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Archie Hind. The Dear Green Place. London. New
Authors Limited. 1966. 231 pp. 25 shillings.

This novel takes its title from the Gaelic "Gles Chu," the "dear
green place" which is Glasgow. There is, however, nothing idealised
about Hind's portrayal of his city, for the closest to pastoral is a
scene in the spoiled fields of Rutherglen, and the characters are mainly
from the lower middle class who live drably among "the oldest in-
dustrial landscape in the world," (p. 21). The Dear Green Place is
remarkable for its realism in portraying the life of the city, not just
in its topographic exactness, or even in an accumulation of finely
observed details, but in reflecting a changing relationship and aware-
ness of place in the mind of the hero. In this respect Hind goes far
beyond Alan Sharp's A Green Tree in Gedde. Sharp's Greenock was
only a well portrayed background; here the city is the novel.

Hind's plot is simple and unoriginal. His hero, Mac Craig, is trying
to write a novel about the history of Glasgow. He quits an office

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