James Kinsley (ed.) The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns. Oxford University Press. 1968. 3 vols. $44.00.

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BOOK REVIEWS

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For the Centenary of the death of Robert Burns, William E. Henley and Thomas F. Henderson published their edition of the poetry: ROBERT BURNS, 4 vols. (I & II, 1896; II & IV, 1897), Edinburgh. This Henley and Henderson to this day has remained the standard. Even though Kinsley's new and conservative Oxford edition successfully challenges the supremacy of the 1896, those who take their Burns seriously will discover need for both editions.

The seventy and more years after the Henley and Henderson have brought the source studies of Alois Brandl's pupils, the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, Dick's edition of the songs, Ferguson's edition of the letters, Egerer's bibliography, STS critical editions of Burns's Scottish precursors, SND to "Skar," Snyder's and Ferguson's biographies, Daiches' and Crawford's criticism as well as other key books and a legion of scholarly articles published in such staples as the BURNS CHRONICLE. Old hands continue with their work: Ross Roy with a new edition of the letters, Robert Fitzhugh with a biography, John Weston with a paperback of selections. And new hands begin: Serge Hoyt with an exciting approach to the songs.

At the 1930 apogee of interest in Robert Burns, the Clarendon Press prudently engaged the late Robert Dewar, Professor of English Literature at Reading, to edit anew the poems and songs. Dewar went a long way towards locating manuscripts, transcribing, dating, gathering background material, etc. before he required help in 1954 of Professor Charles Kinsley, already respected in academic circles for his excellent editing of John Dryden. Two years later (1956) Dewar died; but even before this loss, Kinsley "had begun afresh on a revised editorial plan."

The Oxford BURNS may have been intended for publication in 1959 as the bi-centenary edition of Burns's birth, even as Henley and Henderson had been the centenary edition of the poet's death. In 1959, however, Kinsley was prepared only to describe his editing, not to publish it (BURNS CHRONICLE, VIII [1959], 7-11). Surmisedly, Dewar had chosen a framework of genre similar to that which Henley and Henderson had used in presenting the posthumous pieces; assuredly, Kinsley would select a biographical framework after the nineteenth-century editors Chambers and Scott Douglas. Henley and Henderson
had printed the works published during Burns's lifetime in the order of their appearance in the various editions which Burns had lived to supervise and had given collations with editions and manuscripts as notes at the end of each volume. Kinsley would print the poems by year or probable year of composition and the songs, wherever the year of composition was certain, within the chronological arrangement of the poems; where the year of composition was uncertain, he would order, if possible, by year of first publication. His copy-text would be first the Kilmarnock and then, for new pieces, the Edinburgh editions of 1787, 1793, and 1794 as they introduced a piece. From subsequent printings he would adopt such new readings as appeared in holograph manuscript to have Burns's authority. Difficulties could be anticipated. What, for example, would an editor do when he had his choice amongst several holograph manuscripts of a song which had not appeared during Burns's life? Here and elsewhere Kinsley would have to admit the principle that "the choice of one version rather than another must often be quite subjective."

The extent of what was left for Kinsley to accomplish after 1959 is implicit in those critical questions which he posed in his essay of that year: What materials had Burns in hand in writing specific songs and what did he himself bring to the refashioning? What was the precise effect of Johnson's and Thomson's collaboration? What is the relationship of the songs to the music, in historical and critical terms? What is the nature of Burns's ballad work and does it differ from that of learned antiquaries like Percy and Scott? Other questions follow. If a single reason must be offered for the failure of the new Oxford edition to meet reasonable expectations, it is exactly that the 1959 questions are unanswered in the 1968 edition. That this edition does not include an introductory essay on Burns and his poetry from the point of view of mid-twentieth century is admission that neither Kinsley nor, indeed, anybody else had finished his homework.

Nevertheless, be it understood, what we have in the 1,678 pages of the handsome Oxford is in some respects superior to what we have had in the Henley and Henderson. First, Kinsley prints whatever is known to be Burns; thus, the high-kilted pieces gain their rightful place. Kinsley's pages are more legible and pleasing, his texts are more sound, his collations enter on the same page as the text to which they refer. He assigns a number to every item and repeats this number in bold face on every page of his commentary so that finding each item is singularly easy. He numbers verses by fives in the right-hand margin; unfortunately, by so doing, he loses the advantage of Henley and Henderson in providing glosses as marginalia. Kinsley far outshines his predecessors in glossary, indexes, and heroic cross-references. Kinsley
prints the music, whereas the centenary editors do not. And Kinsley possesses an exceptional critical mind together with broad knowledge of the scholarship so as to write such solid commentary as that upon the language, doctrine, and form of "Holy Willie's Prayer" or that upon the causes of Scottish emigration for the "Address to Beelzebub."

What differences are revealed by comparing Kinsley's presentation of "Holy Willie's Prayer" with Henley and Henderson's? Because this major poem was not published during Burns's lifetime, both editors turn to manuscripts for their copy-text, the later holding no more important manuscripts than the earlier. For the entire corpus of the poetry, Dewar and Kinsley have manuscripts unknown to Henley and Henderson; the latter, we suspect, had some unknown to the modern editors. How many more manuscripts are behind the Oxford edition is most difficult to ascertain; apparently, at the most, two hundred; but this number would have to include those transcribed by Dewar, yet untraced by Kinsley.

For "Holy Willie" both editors can turn to six manuscript versions, and both choose to lean upon the Glenriddell. In addition to manuscript sources, Henley and Hederson had before them a copy of the 1799 Stewart pamphlet in which Burns's poem first appeared; Kinsley cites "Stewart (1801)," thus making it here and elsewhere (e.g., "On the late Captain Grose's Peregrinations," 1, 494) difficult, if not impossible, for his reader to determine the probable date and place of first publication.

Kinsley is more faithful to his copy-text of "Holy Willie" than Henley and Henderson. Being more faithful, he commits himself to here a "such" (l. 14) and there a "sic" (l. 74); to "mother's" (l. 19), not "mother's"; to "ruler" (l. 29), not "buckler"; to "how I sat" (l. 87), not "how we stood"; to "that" (l. 92), not "wha," despite the fact that five of his six holograph-manuscript sources read "wha." Kinsley's method makes it possible for anybody to piece out his own text, whereas Henley and Henderson piece out a text for the reader which they believe to be Burns at his best.

"Holy Willie" offers particular problems for any editor. For instance, it is possible to insert a sixth stanza from the Stewart pamphlets which is not to be found in the Glenriddell Manuscript. Kinsley chooses to enter the stanza, bracketed, at its proper place within the text; Henley and Henderson, however, place it in their notes because they consider it "inferior" and "interrupting thought"; in note or commentary each editor presents arguments for what he does, so that the reader may clearly know what his own preference signifies. Again, lines 89-90, the reader comes upon a major difference. Kinsley with manuscript authority gives "gaed sneaking"; Henley and Henderson assuming that Stewart had an early manuscript for his text give "an' snaking"
(glossed "sneering"); each editor notes the other's reading. Here, inductively, Kinsley improves the earlier editors, particularly insofar as it does not seem possible to find reputable dictionary authority for glossing "snakin" as "sneering." When the SCOTTISH NATIONAL DICTIONARY publishes "S," such authority may be found; if so, I for one would adopt Henley and Henderson. Otherwise, the centenary editors like to make spelling and punctuation regular, to capitalize such words as "Heaven" and "Hell," and to capitalize "Thysel" when referring to God. Other differences from Kinsley become apparent in the following illustration:

[Henley and Henderson, II, 28]

XI

Lord, mind Gau'n Hamilton's deserts:
cards He drinks, an' swears, an' plays at cartes,
Yet has sae monie takin arts
    Wi' great and sma',
Frae God's ain Priest the people's hearts
He steals awa.

[Kinsley, I, 77]
L—d mind Gau Hamilton's deserts!
He drinks, and swears, and plays at cartes,
Yet has sae mony taking arts
    Wi' Great and Sma',
Frae G-d's ain priest the people's hearts
He steals awa.—

Neither editor has a single variant for this stanza. Only Henley and Henderson note that "God's ain Priest" refers to William Auld and thereby relate "Holy Willie" to "The Twa Herds." Each editor includes a general glossary in his last volume. In theirs (IV, 154), Henley and Henderson offer the entry "Monie, many." Kinsley gives

monie, mony, adj., n. many 24. 40,
47. 3, 55. 65. [OSC., OE. moniz.]

None of Kinsley's glossarial citations, however, refers to "Holy Willie's Prayer" (1.69); and the first two of the three cite "monie," not "mony" to suggest that the former was more acceptable to Burns. An advantage of Kinsley's ordering of the poems becomes plain in observing that the Oxford editor follows "Holy Willie's Prayer" with the "Epitaph on Holy Willie"; Henley and Henderson, on the other hand, group this epitaph with other epitaphs later on in the volume.

For every poem or song published posthumously like "Holy Willie's Prayer," one might expect similar difficulties for the editor as he moves from certainties of what Burns himself approved for publication. Such is not always the case, however. The "Epistle to Hugh Parker" still is
not known to exist in a holograph manuscript and still is thought to have been published first by Allan Cunningham in 1834; so Kinsley prints exactly what Cunningham gives as his text. Some difficulty is encountered in editing a poem like the "Epistle to John Rankine, Enclosing some Poems," which like the Hugh Parker is unknown in holograph manuscript, but unlike the Hugh Parker was given the most careful attendance on publication that Robert Burns ever gave (that for the Kilmarnock). Here Kinsley's method requires that he print from the Kilmarnock and then collate with the editions of 1787, 1793, and 1794. There is only one variant to be marked duly at the bottom of a page (I, 61). As editor, Kinsley does make minor changes in the Kilmarnock text according to principles succinctly described in his Textual Introduction (III, [963]). Thus the second word of the opening line is given in small caps, the first line of each stanza is aligned with the second, and thus the long "s" is discarded. Despite such changes, much of the visual sense of the first edition remains. One further example from the posthumously published poems may suffice. The "Address to Beelzebub" was first printed in THE SCOTS MAGAZINE for February, 1818 (H&H, II, 388). Kinsley adopts the unique holograph text of the Watson MSS (I, 254). If his reader wished to collate this text with that of the first printing, he would have no way of knowing where to find the latter; for neither in footnote to the Oxford text nor in commentary is THE SCOTS MAGAZINE mentioned.

Generally, for the poems, scholars of Burns will want to recognize indebtedness to Dewar and Kinsley for their assiduous searching out holograph manuscripts and to Kinsley for his patiently introducing modern standards of editing.

Without doubt Kinsley is much more at home with the poems than with the songs, and more at home with the songs than with their music. Finally having the music in a major edition of Burns will be considered by some as the single most significant advance beyond the Henley and Henderson. Like Dick, Kinsley gives only the melodic line, as simply as possible without such suggestions for harmony as presented by the figured bass of the SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM or by such harmonizations as Thomson bought of Kozeluch, Haydn, Beethoven, and others. Unlike Dick, Kinsley makes no effort to transpose to a singable range. Morag. Push about the jorum, Will ye lend me your loom, last, and many another tune will take most singers to their tip toes and higher. And unlike Dick, Kinsley does not accommodate the singer by printing the words of the first stanza and chorus with the melody or by consistently designating the chorus with "Chorus." Reader as well as singer will scratch his head when he finds the music without the
lead of the first stanza! Regrettably for such as an Oxford edition, the
tune is not printed with every song set to it. Thus after "The For- 
cinator" (I, 101) the reader will find only "Tune, Close the Cal- 
dron." To gain the music, he has to pick up Volume Two, search the Index 
of Airs, find the reference "84. 165," return to Volume One, hunt for 
Item 84 (numeration of items in Volumes One and Two are not given 
at the top of each page bearing the text, as they are in Volume Three), 
and come upon the tune (I, 204) in the midst of THE JOLLY BEG- 
GARS. By flipping between Pages 101 and 204, the reader finally can 
bring words and music together in a precarious matching. Such work 
requires an ample table, not a music stand; for the Oxford volumes 
are heavy.

How much "propriety" Kinsley wins by rejecting a tune in the 
MUSEUM in order to give it as a direct transcript from an eighteenth-
century music-book ancedating Burns is debatable. Burns was still alive 
when Johnson published "Fae the friends and Land I love" (MUSEUM, 
IV, 312); presumably, the poet as well as Stephen Clarke and the editor 
knew that the verses were intended for the tune Carron Side as printed 
in the MUSEUM. Because he found this music "distracting" and having 
"inappropriate ornament," Kinsley rejects the MUSEUM to substitute 
from the CALEDONIAN POCKET COMPANION of 1756 a Carron 
Side with seven trills and a number of grace notes. It is a risky business 
to speculate upon just how Burns may have had a melody, just as it is 
a risky business not to weigh and consider for whom Burns copied out 
a poem or song to enclose with a letter. Again, we know that Burns 
was unhappy with the MUSEUM Dainstie Davie to which his "There 
was a lad" was set; but we cannot be sure that what he had in mind 
was the tune as it appears in McGibbon's SCOTS TUNES (1746), the 
tune which Kinsley prefers to the MUSEUM and prints. Is it not more 
likely that the Dainstie Davie of both Burns and Johnson was the tune 
as published by McGibbon in February, 1788, not the one published 
fourty-two years earlier?

Even after allowing for a need to reduce commentary, one may 
still say that nowhere does Kinsley show less command of materials 
and scholarship than in his presentation of the songs. It is one thing 
not to take notice of the sources for "A red red rose" which Erich 
Schweisguth presented in his SCHOTTISCHE VOLKSLYRIK (1920) or 
to pass by the work of Meyerfeld and Molenaar; but it is another thing 
not to be aware that the tune I am a man unmarried for "Handsome 
Nell" has been identified and published or to say that "no original" has 
been recovered for "Young Jamie," when Otto Ritter included such an 
original in ANGLIA as early as 1909. From the Preface (vii) Kinsley's 
reader learns that he will be expected to continue his reliance upon
Dick's work on the music (1903), even though "Not always accurate." Sixty-five years of scholarship have corrected and amplified Dick; but the Oxford BURNS makes use of not much of that material which pertains to the music and introduces not all of that material pertaining to the verses which he should expect for his $44.00. Not much sense can be made of "Let not woman e'er complain" without some reference to Köseluch and Thomson or without some attempt to explain the relationship of these verses to the songs "Weary fa' you, Duncan Gray" and "Duncan Gray cam here to woo." The commentary on "Charlie he's my darling" acknowledges that the song is "Burn's lyric reduction of a long romantic street ballad" (III, 1503) and tells the reader where to find this source, but Kinsley stops short without a word on the important literary question of what was the nature of Burn's reduction.

"Tam o' Shanter" has eighteen pages of commentary; "Scots, wha hae," three. Two-thirds of the commentary upon Robert Bruce's march is by way of explicating the genesis of the song. Kinsley (III, 1439) cites Fitzhugh's essay of 1936 without, evidently, being aware of James Cameron Ewing's essays of 1937 and 1938 which correct Fitzhugh. Syme, not Cunningham wrote the two notes which Kinsley continues erroneously to call Cunningham's. Furthermore, it is unreliable in the least to charge Currie with fabrication, as Kinsley does charge Currie, without taking into account the distinct possibility that "Scots, wha hae" was one of Burn's pieces which Currie and Syme talked over when Syme visited Liverpool in August, 1797. Kinsley incorrectly assumes that Currie worked only from Syme's letter to Cunningham, whereas it is known from such materials as the notebook which Currie kept on his editing Burns that he had additional, reliable sources.

Kinsley's account of the genesis of "Scots, wha hae" is unacceptable. If so, what might be considered acceptable? Perhaps the following: I think that "Scots, wha hae" was one of those "grand pieces" that entered the mind of Robert Burns while the poet was touring Galloway with John Syme in August, 1793, as I think that Burns sent Dalzell a version of the song shortly after the tour concluded. I believe that Burns continued at work upon the song so as to be able to send George Thomson another version on or about the thirtieth of August; and I know that he kept at the verses for sometime afterward, for in September, 1793, he mailed still another version to Thomson (LETTERS, II, 197). Syme's account of the tour, as a letter to Alexander Cunningham, bears the post-office stamp "AU 28." Just about four years after this date Syme went to Liverpool to be of whatever help he could in forwarding the subscription-edition of Burns under the editorship of Dr. James Currie. I suggest that the two men talked over the songs and, specifically for anyone knowing Currie, "Scots, wha hae"; that Syme recounted to
the doctor all that he recalled about the creation of this song; and that, then or soon thereafter, Currie jotted down the salient points of Syme’s disclosure. We know that Syme in 1797 admitted to being rather murky and that because of this inability to remember all, asked Cunningham to lend Currie the letter-sketch of 1793. Having set his memory to work already, Syme found something to add to his sketch before mailing it to Liverpool; and I believe that it is not at all unlikely that he gave Currie still more information in a letter written to convey the sketch. I believe that from such materials and with a bias from the fashion of Gothicism Currie drew his account of “Scors, wha hae,” not hesitating to make this account jibe with what he had been told to be true and, customarily for reasons beyond his control, not setting down particulars of sources.

No edition of Robert Burns will answer every question. The principal questions which Kinsley’s edition leaves unanswered are those which the editor himself phrased in 1959. Answers to several other questions may be in the almost 2,000 pages, but where? Where does Professor Dewar’s work stop and Professor Kinsley’s begin? How many poems and songs are added to the Oxford which are not in the Henley and Henderson? Still other questions refer to convictions and editorial principles. Did Burns or Tytler control editing of the 1793? If one drops the long “s,” might he not fill in blanks? Such as in the following:

When maukin bucks, at early f—s
And birds on boughs, take off their m—s.

To have these lines, even as they are with all the pocher of possibly having to search for “m—s” in a glossary at the back of another volume, is to own the greatest strength of the Oxford edition: restoration of Burns’s complete virility. To find “Butchers” for “lambkins” (“Address to Beelzebub,” 1. 6) is to find Robert Burns. Kinsley’s Oxford makes one of man and poet as no edition heretofore.

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