

## REVIEWS

**TWO HUNDRED FOLK CAROLS.** Edited by Sir Richard R. Terry,  
Mus.Doc., F.R.C.O. (Burns Oates; 18/-)

Carols, like folk-songs, are pre-eminently a national product, and the carols of each nation should be studied separately. This book scores in its method by grouping the carols into nations or districts. Thus we have English Traditional, English Medieval (both already reviewed in these pages), French, Besançon, Béarnaise and Burgundian, Provençal, Basque, Dutch and Flemish, German and Polish, and European Medieval groups. It is the most splendid and complete book of carols which has yet appeared in this country. Its scholarship is guaranteed by the name of its editor, and many are the exquisite tunes with which he has presented us in their best and original forms. One could wish perhaps that some of the harmonizations had been lighter and simpler; too thick an underlaying, such as he gives at times, tends to obscure the melody—they verge occasionally even on the sentimental. Perhaps this is churlish, since carols are mainly intended for unison singing, as he points out. The literary side of the book is perfect. The old English words stand on their own, and Latin words are frequently given as well; for the foreign carols, there are lovely versions by excellent translators.

The exterior of the book is pleasing, and the interior has many good points, black and readable type, indices of the titles of foreign carols, and of first lines. One could have wished for a metrical index. It seems a pity that it should be so costly, but the wealth of its contents makes up for its cost. In any case, it need not frighten choirmasters, because all the parts may be obtained separately at prices from 3/6 to 1/-, and it is not necessary to buy them all at once. This separation of the parts has led to a very inconvenient pagination; each one starts afresh, but the possessor of the complete volume need not be worried by this when he realises that the numbers of the carols are continuous.

FRANCIS MONCRIEFF, O.P.

## THE PLAY

The *Duchess of Malfi*, which has been revived at the *Embassy*, is not, as it is often loosely termed, Elizabethan, but Jacobean, and its whole tenor is illustrative of the changed spirit of the later period. The playwright seeks no longer the creation of characters of mythical grandeur, seeming to move in a world of their own. In Webster, creation is doubled by analysis; he presents us here with an almost Freudian study of how pathological cruelty may spring from unrecognized lust; while

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his scenes of horror, so fantastic that they can hardly carry conviction to a modern audience, are the more incredible because many of his personages have an every-day and even modern humanity. They have, in particular, a self-consciousness absent in the Elizabethans; moral motives become more explicit, the words 'sin,' 'conscience,' recur constantly. Even the villain Bosola analyses his acts, half-hearted in his blackest villainies, till the murder of the Duchess, once accomplished, shocks him unto unavailing repentance. Nor does the murder end the play; a whole subsequent act is devoted to the moral disintegration of its perpetrators, whose death is the final climax. Here, in a setting of melodrama, we have the beginning of that deliberate reflection on the workings of the human mind that was one of the characteristics of the seventeenth century.

The production is on the whole very good, though time-limits have made over-drastring cutting inevitable. The lovely part of the Duchess, with her wit and courage and natural gaiety, her tragic grandeur in unendurable misery: 'I am Duchess of Malfi still'—with the maternal tenderness that made her last words recommend her maid to give her little boy 'some syrup for his cough, and teach the girl to say her prayers'—this part was played with grace and dignity by Miss Joyce Bland. Mr. Neil Porter adequately conveyed the cold malice of her brother the Cardinal, while the second brother, Fernando, all passion, animal man without restraint of reason, was rendered with convincing temperament by Mr. John Laurie.

If seventeenth century classics are always of interest, modern classics are perhaps even more so. And it is as a classic that I count Mr. Denis Johnston's *The Moon in the Yellow River* at the Haymarket. It gives a sense of an underlying pattern of metaphysic; you look through the play, in itself alive and coherent, as through a window opening on vaster issues. A German engineer, Catholic, romantic, drawn by poetic enthusiasm for Ireland, comes to dedicate himself to her service, installing a great electrical power station. A part of Ireland, represented by the Free State soldier, eagerly accepts this symbol of Modern Progress. But the elfish Ireland of Synge's *Playboy* rejects it as alien to her spirit; she destroys the German's power-station and breaks his heart, as she has broken the heart of innumerable lovers. (One thinks of Erskine Childers, and, in fiction, though surely typical and observed from life, of Canon Sheehan's *New Curate*.) The characterization, the dialogue, the tragic plot, the humorous relief, are all masterly; production and acting are worthy of what is among the finest plays of our time.

BARBARA BARCLAY CARTER.