

AUNTRAN BLADS: An Outwate o Verses. By Douglas Young.  
(William Maclellan, Glasgow; 6s.)

When Hamilton of Gilbertfield congratulated Alan Ramsay in 1719 or so, in as much as 'nowther Highlandman nor Lawlan' had outstripped him 'in poetrie,' he unwittingly emphasised the decay of Scots culture: the decay in particular of two native idioms which had rotted under ecclesiastical and official disfavour since the Reformation and the Stuart trek to England. Gaelic had long gone under as a literary language; but that Lallans or Braid Scots should have gone under too, needs a word of explanation. Lallans was originally the common speech of the Lowlands and Northumbria. Northumbria went 'Southeroun'; but the Lowlands not only stuck to Lallans but enriched it with Latin and French accessions which made it an uncommonly robust and opulent language. To read, for instance, Dunbar's 'Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis' is to enter a world not only of vernacular vigour but of international scholarship. When English supremacy swamped this world, it is heartening to remember that Scots Catholics stood out for it. Knox was taunted by Ninian Winyet for his Southeroun style as well as for his Southeroun heresies; Mary Stuart and the Jesuit Father Hay begged for books 'written in the Scottish language'; and a Scots Catholic catechism still lies (one is told) unpublished among the Barberini MSS. in Rome.

With any revival of nationality, it is inevitable that the nation's tongue should be used by the nation's poets. *Auntran Blads*, the occasional poetry of Douglas Young, Chairman of the Scottish Nationalist Party, exhibits first and foremost a superb and well-justified confidence in his native Lallans: not only as the fittest medium for Scots reverie or meditation (or, as he would say, 'musardry o thocht'), but as a medium to bring the international world of poetry home to the Scot without, so to speak, transshipping it from England. In its heyday, Lallans' poetry was both learned and popular; so the spectacle of a Professor of Greek turned singer and satirist, and juggling with the coloured balls of poesy translated from a dozen living and dead tongues, is in the strict Scots tradition of the Wandering Scholars of the Middle Ages.

There is not much English in the book. Yet English serves exquisitely to introduce Douglas Young's nostalgia 'For the Old Highlands.'

That old lonely lovely way of living  
in Highland places,—twenty years a-growing,  
twenty years flowering, twenty years declining,—  
father to son, mother to daughter giving  
ripe tradition; peaceful bounty flowing;  
one harmony all tones of life combining,—  
old wise ways, passed like the dust blowing.

That harmony of folk and land is shattered,—  
 the yearly rhythm of things, the social graces,  
 peat-fire and music, candle-light and kindness.  
 Now they are gone it seems they never mattered,  
 much, to the world, those proud and violent races,  
 clansmen, and chiefs whose passioned greed and blindness  
 made desolate these lovely lonely places.

Less humane in their appeal than such original lyrics are the Lallans translations from the Gaelic of Sorley Maclean. (It is permissible to think that their anti-Christian bias is due to inability to distinguish between Christ and the Kirk—surely a pardonable error in a Communist Scot.) More truly representative of Douglas Young's, in the secular sense, extremely Catholic spirit, are the rest of the Lallans translations—from French, German, Italian, Chinese, Russian, Lithuanian, Latin and Greek originals. These range from a German epigram on a Mole, who as 'the Mowdie fae his couthie neuter' becomes a naturalised compatriot of Henryson's 'Uplandis Mous,' to a heroic rendering of Iliad VI, 392-496.

Sae spate gesserant (shining) Hektor, and liftit the bassanat  
 blythlie,  
 horse-hair-crestit and aa; and his dear wife gaed awa hame with,  
 turnan aften to luik at her man, aye greitant fou sairlie.

HELEN PARRY EDEN.

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