

that Mr. Peacock fully displays his incompetence. He can say little which the reader cannot discover for himself ; his phrasing is sometimes positively uncouth. These are representative passages, which speak for themselves. ' He does it by his mythical manner, and by tone and rhythm.' ' Sometimes, indeed, because of the very swell and overfulness . . . there is a certain monumental quality ; something comparable is found in Michel Angelo and Beethoven.' And his final summary: ' He scaled heights which very few have touched . . . He has quite a remarkable spiritual centre of gravity, which is felt throughout his work.'

Hölderlin is an important poet, who deserves to be better known in England. This time he has been unfortunate in his advocate.

H. L. BRADBROOK.

## NINETEENTH-CENTURY SCOTLAND IN ALLEGORY

*THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS*, by George Douglas (' *World's Classics*, ' 2/- ).

The appearance of George Douglas Brown's single novel *The House with the Green Shutters* as a ' World's Classic,' suggests that the book has claims both to be regarded as a ' classic ' and nearly forty years after its first appearance (1901) to be read. Whether or not it has claims to be read is the test ; for a classic that will be content to ornament a bookshelf is a classic of a very equivocal kind. It was doubtless the vogue half a century ago of idyllic ' kailyard ' fiction that provoked George Douglas to the prosaic ' realism ' of his book. But what appears rather to sustain it is an almost terrifying dissatisfaction with the Scotland itself he had known. The book not merely implies a criticism of certain other books that in any case are no longer read—that it killed the ' kailyard ' type of fiction in its historical importance—it implies a radical *social criticism* amounting to an indictment, and it is as such that it may have its present importance ; for while I would not admit it to the highest rank as a work of the novelist's art—to the rank that is to say of *Wuthering Heights*,

the novel with which one immediately compares it in one's mind—its value *as a work of art* seems to me to depend on the values of the social criticism it successfully implies. As a 'tragedy' detached from these implications it seems to me at once 'conventional' as if its author were striving to conform to some exterior idea of 'tragedy' which he supposes himself perhaps to have got from the Greeks. Expectation is preferred to surprise according to the best models; the 'bodies' are thought of as filling the role of the 'chorus,' and so on. The scenes of pity (not weakly indulged) and terror—horror rather—towards the end would appear to justify it as a 'tragedy' in this conventional sense. But the source of all that power the book undoubtedly has, can, it seems to me, be shown to exist in reality in the terrible nature of its social criticism.

The novel presents a number of different individuals—centering in the members of the Gourlay family—in the setting of a small local community—that of Barbie—which is in a late phase of disintegration. Whether or not Barbie was characteristic of the Scotland of the nineteenth century must be left to someone other than the literary critic to confirm; in any case 'Barbie' has, I think, a general application. 'Barbie has been a decaying burgh for thirty years,' we are told explicitly in the beginning of the second chapter. To call Barbie a community is indeed to extend the meaning of the word unduly; it has ceased to be an 'organic community'; there is no longer a fruitful co-operation between its members. The 'bodies' who represent the last of the local public opinion and should have been, without necessarily knowing it, the guiding and controlling centre of the community are—destructive worms bred out of the decaying organism—idly malicious gossipers and backbiters. Yet the 'bodies' are in a sense what has become of the past, and as traditional figures are significant, as well as richly comic. The Deacon, and for example (at the beginning of Chapter XXII) David Aird, the City bounder about to return to the City after finding Barbie 'too quiet for his tastes' ('Thank God, we'll soon be in civilization') form a significant comic contrast; but it is the Deacon alone who is satirically aware of the others.

The laird and the minister who would have been shown as somewhere near the centre had the novel been written in the

eighteenth century, are little more here than dots on the periphery. The laird has sunk into identity with the surrounding commonalty. He is proud to have an evening's 'sederunt' with old Gourlay—at least until he marries a miller's daughter (of a different sort from Tennyson's—'Her voice went with the skirl of an east wind through the rat-riddled mansion of the Hallidays'). The minister, the Rev. Mr. Struthers, is an exceptionally stupid peasant—he has taken ten years to enter the Church and has had a reverence for the university ever since, though what he reverences about it is mainly the wonder of its administrative machinery. The scene (Chapter XX) in which he congratulates the young prize-winner ('Ability to write is a splendid thing for the Church') is one of the richest in comedy.

As for the schoolmaster he 'rarely leaves' his studying of the theory of Political Economy—

" " Ay," he said dryly, " there's a wheen gay cuddies in Barbie!" and he went to his stuffy little room to study *The Wealth of Nations*.'

—a study which being disconnected from what is happening around him in Barbie is socially barren. Here there is a society without aristocratic or ecclesiastical or even pedagogic leadership or guidance. Presbyterianism itself is no longer substantial; it persists vestigially as some of its effects. It has left behind a certain hardness and bitterness in character and conversation, an absence of sap and sweetness:

" " It's a fine morning, Mr. Gourlay." "

" " There's naething wrong with the morning," grunted Gourlay, as if there was something wrong with the Deacon.'

The Provost's 'Huts, man, dinna sweer sae muckle!' is a kind of unconscious reminiscence of the grave reproofs of elders. The ironic technique of the traditional speech goes on functioning out of relation to its proper object.

" " What's that your're burying your nose in now?" and if she faltered " It's the Bible," " Hi " he would laugh, " you're turning godly in your auld age. Weel, I'm no saying but it's time!" "

The skeleton of Presbyterianism can seem terribly forbidding:

‘ Heavy Biblical pictures, in frames of gleaming black like the splinters of a hearse, were hung against a dark ground.’

There being no longer a community holding together and controlling its members, the sheer individual, Gourlay, of peasant stock, stupid, but of tremendous dourness and brute force of ‘ character ’ thrusts upward. He builds the House with the Green Shutters on the top of the hill. It represents his attempt at self-sufficiency—the house apart. ‘ It is his character in stone and lime,’ and it dominates the town. Since the public opinion—as represented by the ‘ bodies ’—is important to control him the malevolence of the ‘ bodies ’ grows monstrous against him. With shakes of the head they judge Gourlay’s house as Vanity and ‘ Pride that *will* have a downcome.’ But the traditional judgment loses most of its force from being made the vehicle of their petty personal spite.

Gourlay maintains his position till the advent of another individual—Wilson—who although a native of Barbie has been—significantly—*away* for an interval of years.

‘ In his appearance there was an air of dirty and pretentious well-to-do-ness. It was not shabby gentility. It was like the gross attempt to dress of your well-to-do publican.’

He introduces the familiar modern business methods. (They are described in some detail in Chapters X, XI and XIII).

‘ Now the shops of Barbie (the drunken man’s shop and the dirty man’s shop always excepted, of course) had usually been low-browed little places with faded black scrolls above the door, on which you might read in dim gilt letters (or it might be white)

“ Licens’d To Sell Tea & Tobacco.”

‘ When you mounted two steps and open the door, a bell of some kind went in the interior, and an old woman in a mutch, with big specs slipping down her nose, would come up a step from a dim little room behind, and wiping her sunken mouth with her apron—she had just left her tea—would say, “ What’s your wull the day, Sir?” and if you said your “ wull ”

was tobacco, she would answer, "Ou, sir, I dinna sell ocht now but the tape and the sweeties," And then you went away, sadly.

'With the exception of the dirty man's shop, and the drunken man's shop, that kind of shop was the Barbie kind of shop. But Wilson changed all that.'

Gourlay, although a type of the individualism which both followed from and contributed to the break-up of the Scottish community, is himself thoroughly Scottish. Wilson is no longer Scottish but nondescript modern commercialism and 'progress.'

The downfall of the Gourlay family gains in significance from being a particular instance of a more general downfall. The house of Gourlay looks well enough from the outside and in its yard—

'A cock pigeon strutted round, puffing his gleaming breast and *rocketty-cooing* in the sun. Large, clear drops fell slowly from the spout of a wooden pump, and splashed upon a flat stone'—

but inside it is in filthy disorder for Gourlay has a sluttish wife and his son and daughter are ailing in mind and in body; the fruit of Gourlay's pride is internally rotten. Gourlay's attempt to found a self-contained house and family dominating Barbie has to come to nothing sooner or later in any case, for young Gourlay, his son and heir, is a 'weakling.' Yet we are shown clearly enough that brought up in more favourable conditions there is sufficient in young Gourlay to have brought forth some fruit. He is gifted with a wealth of sensuous perceptiveness represented in passages of a prose that in this respect reminds one oddly of Katherine Mansfield's.

But as young Gourlay's schoolmaster and, later, his professor perceive, he is without the mind and character to use this wealth so as to make it something other than an incubus. The difficulties of the sensitive adolescent Scot are dealt with in a way that seems to anticipate what *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* does for the Irish adolescent. In the case of the adolescent Scot there is almost no tradition, no sympathetic understanding community to guide him; prematurely born, he is subjected only to the brutal will of his father and the weak indulgence of his mother. Not

that the novelist attempts to invoke our sympathy for him. He is dealt with as unsympathetically as almost everyone else in the book. It is part of the bracing effect of the book that it is almost wholly unsympathetic. Douglas is a stringent moralist, scrupulous searching our moral failure. As a moralist he is perhaps too *explicit* for a novelist. But as that is not a fault of much modern work it is almost to be welcomed here as a sign of health than otherwise. A moral preoccupation in the finest sense of 'moral' may be held to be an essential for a novelist, perhaps for any artist.

Young Gourlay is sent to Edinburgh University to be made into a minister. "Eh, but it's a grand thing a gude education! You may rise to be a minister," his mother had said when he was sent to the secondary school. "It's a' he's fit for" his father had growled.' Old Gourlay has no illusions as to the sacred profession. He wants to put his son into it as an expedient for saving the falling fortunes of his house. At this point then the focus is shifted from a small rural burgh to the very capital of Scotland itself and to what might be expected to be the centre of its cultural life, Edinburgh University. Young Gourlay at Edinburgh is partly a test of what Edinburgh and its university have to offer. It might not have been too much to expect that here if anywhere the youth might have found the conditions lacking in Barbie favourable for the multiplication of his single talent. Douglas's picture of Edinburgh and its university is no flattering one. Edinburgh offers the 'weakling' only too much encouragement in his suicidal tendency to whiskey-addiction. The lecture rooms, where as one of a mob of rowdy students he has his sole opportunity of confronting his professor, are twice presented in the condition of a bear-garden. 'Auld Tam,' the Scots professor, is indeed a figure to be reckoned with. He is representative of the Scots professor of the days before Scots professors were mostly Englishmen from Oxford and Cambridge, and he possesses powers of mind and character (he quells the unruly students with the humorous acerbity of his tongue) which we are bound to respect. Being also a representative of the tradition of philosophy and abstract speculation which we associate more especially with the Edinburgh of the eighteenth century, he is in general amusingly inadequate when attempting to deal with something so concrete

and particular as literature. What effective culture there might seem still to be in Edinburgh is represented by the Allan circle. There seems to me a serious weakness betrayed by Douglas in his portrayal of this circle (Chapter XVII). The novelist seems to accept it almost at its own valuation. If, as appears, Douglas intends it to be regarded as really 'brilliant,' he does not succeed in convincingly representing it as such. Could it have been that Douglas, in general so without illusions, was himself impressed by the sort of thing represented by Tarmillan, the most 'brilliant' apparently of the Allan circle? The superficial, even vulgar, cleverness of the wit of Tarmillan's conversation is something sadly inferior to the corresponding thing there is reason to believe there was in the Edinburgh of the eighteenth century. 'The Howff'—the pub which night after night lures young Gourlay to it out of his dismal room and away from his uncongenial books—represents what had become of the tradition to which at an earlier phase Burns's poetry belongs. It is a survival from the older Scotland ; as is the groset-fair and such an episode (and such a vocabulary) as the following :

' They roared and sang till it was a perfect affront to God's day, and frae sidie to sidie they swung till the splash-brods were skreighing on the wheels. At a quick turn o' the road they wintled owre ; and there they were, sitting on their douns in the atoms o' the gig, and glowering frae them !'

But for young Gourlay 'the Howff' is no longer an expression of the robust enjoyment of bucolic life ; it is merely a refuge to shrink into from the terrors that assail his sensitivity. The novel ends, inevitably, on the notes of Insanity, Disease, Murder, Suicide. The tendency is not only in young Gourlay ; it is in the whole of the society of which the novel is a grim representation. This seems to me the nature of the tragedy of the novel, by virtue of which it may prove permanently applicable.

What is to be one's final word on the book as a contribution to literature? The quality of a novel is of course that of its prose both locally and as a cumulative organic whole. The passages extracted above give a fair idea of Douglas's prose at its working best. The purple patch about the thunderstorm at young Gourlay's birth (Chapter VI) might be extracted, together with its echo

later (Chapter XIV) that so terrified the truant boy, if the comparison with *Wuthering Heights* is to be insisted on. But Douglas's prose is not always so good. At times it appears insufficiently controlled—emotions 'seethe' and 'boil'—and on the other hand, while frequently exhibiting a rich particularity, it occasionally drops into something like the journalist being 'literary.' That the book was Douglas's first (and only) novel may explain its immaturities, as its astonishing power may seem to have offered great promise of future achievement; but it's not easy to believe that the life of a journalist in London would have qualified him to write a greater Scottish novel; and in any case considerations of what he might have done ought not to deflect the critical judgment on what he did do. That Douglas's prose should so consistently preclude sympathy is of course its unusual strength. If that unsympathy could have been converted into a purely artistic detachment and sustained as such the novel would have been a great work of art. Unfortunately, as an examination of its prose at once confirms, the unsympathy is not always that of detached and seriously poised art, but seems at times to proceed from an unresolved personal animus. There is not space to extract the opening passage of the book for examination, but I may perhaps refer to it. It is Douglas's prose at its best, but even here the 'silly' of 'The silly *tee-hee* echoed up the street' is perhaps a sign of this insecurity. There may be some justice also in the common dismissal of the book as 'merely depressing.' Douglas does indeed refer to certain positives in at least one place—

'To bring a beaten and degraded look into a man's face . . . is an outrage on the decency of life, an offence to natural religion, a violation of the human sanctities'

—but these positives, though referred to, are nowhere strongly and positively realized in the book. If they had been it would perhaps have been a wiser, because more complete, book. Nevertheless if not a great novel it is because of the clarity of the social criticism it implies, a very remarkable one, perhaps the only very remarkable Scottish novel, not excepting the earlier Scottish novels of Walter Scott and John Galt.

JOHN SPEIRS.



## RUTH ADAM AGAIN

*THERE NEEDS NO GHOST*, by Ruth Adam (Chapman and Hall, 7/6).

This is inferior to the previous novel of this author reviewed in *Scrutiny*. No wonder, seeing it is about the effects of the Munich crisis on Bloomsbury Bohemians and English villagers and came out before Christmas. Apart from being less well written and of a piece than *I'm Not Complaining*, Mrs. (not Miss as previously stated in these pages) Adam is less successful in her choice of her chief mouthpiece—the Vicar's sister, though the last drop of juice is wrung out of her, is a bit too limited to have so much rope and her style of thought a bit Loosish to enjoy for long. The other chronicler, the Bloomsbury young woman, is first-rate in the line of the recounter of *I'm Not Complaining*. With all these reservations, the book is good entertainment literature and something over. There is some good back-chat between the Bohemians, an acute account of the emotions set up in complicated people by the Czech affair, and a more than acute display of the process by which the artificial, *i.e.*, mental, values of Bloomsbury give way, in a village environment and in face of the realities of life, to the real values which tradition has found for a class of people who could never have afforded the luxury of artificial ones. Exposure of false values is always Mrs. Adam's strong suit. She is also masterly here in demonstrating the ineffectiveness of simple goodness in grappling with the political scene as well as the unexpected strength of the *anima naturaliter christiana* in personal relations. I for one consider a novel by Mrs. Adam, who has a point of view, a lively feeling for Character as well as for characters, and a personal sense of values, far more worth having than a sackful of art-novels (for instance, those of Miss Elizabeth Bowen and Miss Kay Boyle). Mrs. Adam remains a novelist not only to read but to watch.

Q.D.L.