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## A LAEVOROTATORY MUSE

**Stony Limits and Other Poems.** By HUGH MACDIARMID.  
*Gollancz. 6s.*

When Burns exchanged his native speech and its imaginative traditions for literary English he proved that he could write as correctly as any eighteenth-century amateur. As far as Scots is concerned, Mr. Hugh MacDiarmid has been a complete movement in himself. The foreigner can sometimes glimpse the quality of his lyric impulse, and the following delightful snatch, for instance, offers no impediment:

A wumman cam' up frae the blaе deeps o' the sea  
And "I'm Jeannie MacQueen," she said, lauchin', to me  
But it's "gi way wi' your oyster-shine, lassie, gi way"  
—For she'd a different colour in the nail o' each tae.

In the present book, however, many of the poems are written in English, and Mr. MacDiarmid proves that he can write as well as your moderns:

Cut water. Perfection of craft concealed  
In effects of pure improvisation.  
Delights of dazzle and dare revealed  
In instant inscapes of fresh variation.

Dunbar certainly packed the chinks of his "aureate" diction with "bastard Latin"; Mr. MacDiarmid seizes joyfully on the modern return of jaw-breaking epithets, "gynandromorphic moods," "immarscescible flowers," "our not inexpert laevorotatory muse," "our abreption from the abderian acidie."

What logodaedaly shall we practise then?  
What loxodromics to get behind the light?  
Glistening with exoskeletal stars we turn in vain  
This way and that and but changing perigraphs gain,  
Parablepsies, caleutures, every cursed paranthelion  
Of this theandric force Pepper's-ghosting God.

But as Mr. MacDiarmid explains:

among these mysteries  
We poets sit ceraunic as a chalumeau.

Thinking that "ceraunic" had something to do with poetry, I looked up the dictionary and found that it means "relating to thunder"; chalumeau is a shepherd's pipe, an instrument that is not usually very thunderous. In the poem entitled "On a raised Beach" Mr. MacDiarmid reaches the stony limit, but it must be admitted that the "jaw-breakers" of this Joycean experiment in geology are not inappropriate to the subject—the "hatched foraminous cavorilieva of the world." Economics, politics, a new world order are reviewed by Mr. MacDiarmid in these lengthy poems, but it seems to me that it is the old-fashioned dominie at the shoulder of all Scotsmen that has prompted this poet of undoubted genius to swallow the English dictionary, and not a modernist impulse. The most moving of these poems, though it is limited in its appeal, is "Lament for the Great Music," an imaginative recalling of the Gaelic past. Mr. MacDiarmid knows probably as little of Gaelic as the Yeatsian school of writers, but this does not diminish the value of his romantic tribute.

AUSTIN CLARKE

## THE ENGLISH INN

**The Old Inns of England.** By A. E. RICHARDSON. *Batsford. 7s. 6d.*

*The Old Inns of England* is a good book; it is, I think, a better book than Tristram's *Coaching Days and Coaching Ways*, which though not concerned with the English inn primarily is nevertheless rich with facts and legends concerning it; and is at least as good a book, and probably fuller, than Thomas Burke's *The English Inn*. The title is significant: *The Old Inns*. That automatically cuts out some thousands of "Tudor" pubs and about as many Ye Olde Hostelrys, as well as countless bathing-pool cum American-bar cum super-garage palaces which adorn the arterial roads. Obviously it does not deal with every old inn there is; old is here almost synonymous with historical. This does not mean that Mr. Richardson is concerned only with those inns where, by some athletic miracle, Queen Elizabeth slept, or where the characters of Dickens put up for the night after somehow escaping from the pages of his novels. But historical implies beautiful or interesting, regardless of an inn's size or antiquity; which means that some little obscure and modest "Red Lion" is likely to receive as much attention as any great country hotel like "The White Hart" at Salisbury or "The Stamford Hotel," the great Regency

hotel in Stamford, Lincolnshire. Every man who picks up the book will at once turn to look for some mention of the inns he knows, his favourite pubs, and those hotels where he was fleeced for bad beds and insolent service. His favourite pubs he is unlikely to find; and if he finds the hotels that fleeced him it will not necessarily mean that Mr. Richardson commends them. From the downright and often caustic tone of his style, which is admirable, I imagine he is not writing the book for the breweries. He may be. In which case I should say he is writing it for a kind of divine brewery whose activities are not yet universally apparent in the world of inns. For what Mr. Richardson admires, and no doubt loves, and what he wants to see increase, is the decent and pleasant house which can offer the traveller not only good beer and rest, but good food and civilised sheets and pillows at a price which will not make his hair stand on end. And the plain fact is that there are too many inns in England, both bogus and genuine, new and antique, whose beer and beds and food and prices are calculated to raise the hair, both aesthetic and financial, of most civilised travellers.

Thus if there is any propaganda at all in Mr. Richardson's book it is either casual or subordinate to his main idea, which is to give some account in decent, unlarded English of the history and purpose and rise and decline of the English inn, from its beginnings in Chaucer's day down through its prosperity in the great woollen days, and its magnificence in Dickens's day, to its dubious state to-day. This he does admirably. He seems to have no personal predilections about periods or size. The magnificence of a Georgian façade is no more to him than a public bar with its Windsor chairs and its dart-board. What he hates in inns is the sham, the ugly, the snobbish; and in innkeepers the sneering, the fleecing and the patronising. I hate them myself.

His book is not comprehensive. There is no reason why it should be. That would leave its readers nothing to discover. It may cause regret to someone that his favourite "Spread Eagle" is not mentioned, but it may lead him to find a certain "Falcon" that is infinitely better. I myself do not see any mention of a little Bedfordshire pub kept in my family; nor of the nameless Darlington hotel where the dinner was high and the bill higher. But I see here a hundred inns I should like to visit, and will. And I have been astonished at the number of architecturally beautiful inns still left in my own country. So that if an American were to ask me what I recommended him to see in England I should now say not St. Paul's or Warwick Castle or Buckingham Palace, but all the countless pubs and alcohouses and commercials and inns and hotels that are in every town and village up and down the countryside. And I should give him this book.

H. E. BATES

## GREAT LIVES

**Carlyle.** By D. LAMMOND. *Duckworth. 2s.*

**Huxley.** By E. W. MACBRIDE. *Duckworth. 2s.*

**Van Gogh.** By PETER BURRA. *Duckworth. 2s.*

**Dumas Père.** By G. R. PEARCE. *Duckworth. 2s.*

**W. G. Grace.** By BERNARD DARWIN. *Duckworth. 2s.*

Messrs. Duckworth are to be congratulated on their enterprising series of Great Lives. I have read a number of these short biographies, and have found them all well written and intelligent. Although for the student they lack detail—and even for the general reader serve more as sign-posts pointing the direction for further inquiries—in one particular, at least, they are all that the heavy volumes of Victorian biography were not; sane and readable interpretations of the aims and objects in which great men interested themselves *ici bas*, and in which pride of place is given to the character of the subject—for it is too often forgotten that biography is almost entirely concerned with portrayal of character. These biographies are modern in the sense that the authors have accepted the fact that not all great men conform to the bourgeois standard of morality. Where, as in so many of the biographies of the last century, those who obviously did not conform are made to do so, the result is a distorted, one-sided view comparable to the grotesque reflections obtained from convex and concave mirrors. Perhaps the most notable and important achievement of this series is that the books read as truths, not tracts.

Carlyle, with his Everlasting Yea and his Everlasting No, stands out as the strong man of the troupe under review. He is both