

people or in his reading of earlier Scottish writing. The English poems in *Sea Glimmer* are competent. It is the poems in Scots, like that which gives the book its title, which grip attention; lines like these:

The taed and horny-goloch snoovled by
 Toom hearths where burly fishers ance made boast
 O' midnichts tempest tossed,
 Their ears aye thrumming wi' the thunder's cry.

No one can dismiss that vocabulary as 'plastic'. It would be understood even by Invernessians.

Douglas Young's book should increase his reputation. On reading *Auntran Blads* (reviewed in a past number of BLACKFRIARS), a doubt came to mind as to what the poet could do on his own, not translating. The translations in that book appeared, to the present writer at least, superior to the original work. The latest volume removes doubts. There is still splendid translation. The version of Psalm 22 (23, A.V.) is a fine achievement. Here are the second and third verses.

He gars my saul, be blyth aince mair
 that wandert was frae hame,
 and leads me on the straucht smaa gait
 for sake o His ain name.
 Tho I suld gang the glen o mirk
 I'd grue for nae mischance,
 Thou bydes wi me, Thy kent and cruik
 maks aye my sustenance.

The other poems in the book, widely varied in subject and including two which use an English vocabulary, show such variety of feeling and command of language and metre as to raise high hopes for the future. So far Douglas Young has often been playing himself, with his remarkable command of tongues. It looks as though the play will lead to something.

ANTHONY ROSS, O.P.

THE GREAT ENCHANTMENTS. By Robert Liddell. (Cape; 9s. 6d.)

The identity of the Christminster of Mr Liddell's novel can be no mystery to the connoisseur of Gothic North Oxford and its inhabitants. Here are preserved, as specimens in ether rather than as bees in amber, the outriders of academic suburbia—landladies and their daughters, retired dons of uncertain career and drawing-room humanitarians.

Mr Liddell's skill is, perhaps, best displayed in observation rather than in invention. The misfortunes of his landlady, indeed the affairs of his characters in general, do not engage our interest very deeply. But the warts and twitches that individuate them are exactly con-

veyed; their houses and rooms are inspected with clinical accuracy. *The Great Enchantments* is a fair copy of an important part of the novelist's work. It lacks emotive compulsion, but its achievement is in another order—less ambitious but no less fascinating to discern.

I.E.

HOLES IN THE SKY. By Louis MacNeice. (Faber & Faber; 7s. 6d.)

With the publication of his new book of poems Mr MacNeice's publishers make the suggestion that some people may have felt that in the writing of radio plays he had 'given up to the B.B.C. what was meant for mankind'. If people do indeed have such a feeling, in a sense, they are justified in it, for it is doubtful whether he has written anything in recent years comparable with some of his felicitous earlier work such as 'The Sunlight on the Garden', but even so there seems little reason to complain: the development of his particular technique as a poet is perhaps best suited to broadcast drama. It may be due to a certain straightforwardness of pictorial imagery—'when barrows of daffodils butter the pavement'—or to an ability, as in 'Weekend' in the present volume, to sustain a metaphor without any sense of strain. At any rate, one has no cause to imagine that he has been misusing his gifts.

One is tempted to wonder how far his 'Elegy for Minor Poets' is intended to apply to himself, for it is, in many ways, curiously relevant to his own position. Mr MacNeice has not the stature of a great poet: of him, too, it might well be said that he 'knew all the words but failed to achieve the Word', because although in his poetry he has facility, slickness and neatness of phrase, he lacks that something additional which would transform his oft-recurring 'Tom, Dick and Harry' into figures of more than passing importance. There is much in his work which reminds one of the lyrics of a clever night-club song-writer, and it is not surprising to learn that some of it has indeed been set to music in this manner. He is probably at his best in his short poems, which are strained taut as a bowstring to shoot their arrows to the dead centre of the target. The epigraph poem

What is truth? says Pilate,
 Waits for no answer;
 Double your stakes, says the clock
 To the ageing dancer;
 Double the guard, says Authority,
 Treble the bars;
 Holes in the sky, says the child
 Scanning the stars.

is such a one, and 'Corner Seat' another.

In the one really long poem in the book, 'The Stygian Banks', one cannot help feeling that he is a little out of his depth: doubtless he is groping after something much profounder and more positive