

**TOOM BYRES.** A Comedy of the Scottish Border in Three Acts. By Robert McLellan. (MacLellan, Glasgow; 5s.)

This play, first produced in 1936 by the Curtain Theatre, has since been produced by the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow, and has also been broadcast. Since its first production the author has added to his reputation as a dramatist who joins good stage sense to a firm command of Scots. His plays use Scots language which is vigorous and natural throughout. The comedy is never dull, never simply 'pawky', and goes with a swing from start to finish. *Toom Byres* is concerned with border reivers in the days of James VI. A success on the stage, it holds attention almost as well when read, although the heroine's change of tune at the end may seem slightly out of character to some readers.

A. R.

**SCOTLAND'S RECORD.** Edited by W. M. Ballantine. (Edinburgh, The Albyn Press; 12s. 6d.)

The thirty-seven essays which make up this book were selected from material written for publication in American, Canadian and Russian journals during the war. Numerous illustrations are taken from documentary films made during the same period on the initiative of the Scottish Office. The general impression left by the volume is one of activity in every direction to a degree not known in Scotland between the wars; with much experiment likely to be of permanent value in industry, fishing, agriculture, education, literature, politics and religion. The essays on agricultural development are uniformly interesting. Essays by Joe Corrie on popular drama, by Norman Wilson on films, and one on the Highlands and Islands Medical Service by an anonymous woman doctor, are also noteworthy. About five of the essays are simply bad, the worst being a survey of art by the Director of the National Gallery which successfully avoids noticing anything of importance in modern Scottish painting. Two or three have a complacency reminiscent of Princes Street on Saturday morning. It is something of a shock to find Mr George Blake writing this: 'The new wealth of the industrial belt had the first effect of attracting people from the hard hilly regions into the new towns, and this had its obvious consequences—on the one hand a regrettable depopulation of the Highland counties especially and, on the other, the overcrowding of the industrial area.' What an ingenuous simplification! Mr Ivor Brown spells the late William Soutar's name wrongly in a tightly packed article on Scottish writing.

In spite of its wartime purpose and its occasional shortcomings this is a book of more than local or merely passing interest.

ANTHONY ROSS, O.P.

**FIRST LOVE AND OTHER STORIES.** By Viola Meynell. (Cape; 9s.)

The extraordinary skill with which Miss Viola Meynell beguiles you into concern for the 'closed shop' atmosphere of comfortably-off, inadequately-occupied people leaves you wondering what she could

do if she let more of the empyrean—or even more of the earth—in upon the dead level little world she usually chooses to write about. Actually she breaks out twice in *First Love*, which reprints eleven tales from *Kissing the Rod*—now out of print—and eight new ones. In *Pastoral* something of the primeval constancy of the seasons—for when did Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter ever let you down?—begins to reintegrate the flimsy wife of a farmer who is yearning after an earlier and more exotic lover. In *La Figlia*—an anthology piece if ever there was one!—the Italian peasant widow of an English banker takes her daughters back to her native village in her guise of genteel tourist; and while she, who alone knows the true position, sustains her role, neither of the girls resists the lure of their unknown ancestry. Here are longish short stories and short short stories—a delightful variety of technical accomplishment. And while *Pastoral* and *La Figlia*, which belong to the former group, are outstanding, it is not so much for their style—for all have style—as for their matter.

H. P. E.

LEON BLOY, the Pauper Prophet. By Emanuela Polimeni. (Dennis Dobson; 6s.)

This is a book without perspective, so close is it to its subject: an autobiography rather than a biography, the material arranged subjectively, the sequence of thought determined underground. In its omissions it is perplexing, but, in the sheer quantity of informative material it contains in 118 pages, it is astounding. A very useful little book for the ignorant-converted.

‘If I have succeeded in awakening some interest in this “immoderate genius”, it is not that readers’ ears should be strained not to miss one blast from his trumpet, but rather that they should be attuned to catch the echoes of those tears and prayers which this pitiful lover of souls so unceasingly offered up for friends and enemies alike, and whose faith in the Gospel verities led him to look upon the absence of sanctity among the professed followers of Christ as the world’s major disaster.’

The author herself took infinite pains and a true vocational interest in the preparation of this study, which at the time seemed likely to be the first book on Bloy published in England. She died after a short sharp illness before it appeared, an admirable, uncompromising Christian devoted to the cause of making the French Catholic writers of the twentieth century revival known in England. She shared something of Bloy’s own zeal for arousing the faithful from apathy while there is yet time. God rest her soul.

R. B.

MANY DIMENSIONS. By Charles Williams. (Faber; 7s. 6d.)

This is the third volume in the new standard edition of Charles Williams’s novels and the name of the author alone is sufficient recommendation. The publishers do what we have come to expect of Messrs. Faber and Faber in making novel reading a physical as well as spiritual pleasure. Since we can read this edition with comfort