

JAMES HOGG, a Critical Study, by Louis Simpson; Oliver and Boyd; 35s.

This book by an American professor is the first of a series called *Biography and Criticism*, under the general editorship of Professor Norman Jeffares and Mr R. L. C. Lorimer. The publishers' note on the dustcover describes the author as 'one of an increasing number of American scholars who realise that in the study of Scottish Literature much territory still remains to be explored'. Here, presumably, is an example of the new exploration.

Its results are at once useful and disappointing; useful inasmuch as Professor Simpson has mapped his territory carefully. Hogg's works have been read systematically and systematically described. This thorough survey is a good manual for anyone who may wish to study Hogg's voluminous and oddly assorted output in prose and verse. It is livened by flashes of critical insight.

At the same time it is disappointing as an assessment of a man and his work. Hogg is perhaps the great example in Scottish literature of a 'lost' writer, potentially great but only rarely approaching the heights of which he was capable. *The Memoirs of a Justified Sinner* is his greatest achievement and also a reminder of some of the influences which crippled him. He was himself an example of the dual personality created so often by Scottish Calvinism; but it would be wrong to blame Calvinism alone for Hogg's condition. The intellectual and social uneasiness of contemporary Scottish writers and critics, indeed of most Scottish society, had much to do with his artistic failure. Professor Simpson is aware of these facts, but does not know the Scottish background sufficiently well to bring discussion of their influence on Hogg to a satisfying conclusion. This would have been a better book perhaps if less space had been given to summary of Hogg's more tedious literary efforts and more to the psychology of the man himself.

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