

Blackfriars

LITERARY DETECTION : A SYMPOSIUM ON 'MACBETH.' By the Rt. Hon. J. M. Robertson, P.C. (George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.; 6/- net; pp. 168.)

This book should be a long delight to advanced students and live critics of Shakespeare. Four friends, preferring real converse to Bridge, that *pons asinorum* as one of them calls it, hold six sessions at which they sympose on the text of 'Macbeth,' its bathetic rhyming tags or gags, and the critics, good and bad. This form gives the work a freedom and discursiveness admirably suited to the matter in hand, and banishes all dryness, so that perfect is the art concealing art. Only one flaw detracts from its persuasiveness and makes it look a little out of date, but this occurs early and must not prejudice against perusal. It is an uncritical reference, *obiter dictum*, to Darwin and his work. Darwin was a mighty man, but the opposition advertised him and consolidated his work; yet his greatness, his patience, and his persecutors never prevented his defective philosophy (if he had anything worth the name) from leading the whole torchlight procession of Biology up the wrong street. But the detection of other fellows' work in Shakespeare's text is much more wary and makes Kyd and Marlowe and Greene and Middleton and such abide our question whilst leaving Shakespeare free. Those who still want arguments to prove that Shakespeare *could not* have written the scene of the Bleeding Sergeant—(prototype of most sergeants of modern times)—that Shakespeare *might* have devised the knocking but would never have given us the hell-gate porter, nor the cauldron of the witches, nor the Malcolm and Macduff dialogue, will find many good ones ready to their hand. If anything, too much is proved. The incident of the witch sailing in a sieve, and like a rat without a tail, etc., is taken literally from a witch-trial in Scotland of the very year before Macbeth was played, a trial in which King James was overmuch interested. Anyone who likes to set about it can find first-hand evidence here and now that whether witches can do what they say, they at least still endeavour. Mr. Robertson's mixing of the certitudes vitiates his critical conclusions, making him, as we said, prove too much. But for one very broad and valuable result the discussion is to be prized. It gives what one hopes may be a parting kick to the oafish ingenuity which has built such a fool's paradise out of the whole body of Shakespeare's work. In ruling out so many lines as never in this world the work of the master mind, it permits us still to suppose that he used or allowed to be used, anything that might, in the judgment of the producers,

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make the play go. He did not write his plays first in an attic and later in a library, but always in and for the theatre. The pressure of the financial mind bent on giving the public what it wants, bore against the poet aching for self-expression, just as much in the spacious days as in our own pinched and dozing time. The vocal splendours of the great playwright must have occurred to him as this or that play went on ill or well in his hearing as he waited for his cue, and improvements in event or plot of well-known or unsuccessful dramas grew and grew in his mind. Was he not the Johannes Factotum, the Jack-of-all-trades in Globe and in Blackfriars? Whatever his work was, it is never tight, always leaving room for either broadening or condensing. Why, cutting him down has become a habit with actors. He was an actor himself, never a mere literary gent, and he wanted the play to pay, first, last, and all the time.

We cannot close without noting a few samples of good sense and good criticism taken almost haphazard: for instance, on pp. 35-6 a long-felt want is met and well met by many proofs that Shakespeare did *not* believe in comic relief to the tension of a dreadful culmination. But the common actor did, as the common fool is the first to break a heavy silence and most silences to him are heavy.

Of Swinburne: 'His concern is always to fulminate rather than to reason, even when he is right. To build up polyphonous periods was his notion of critical method, I am afraid.'

'He was always the *enfant terrible* of criticism,' said Robinson reminiscently, 'and our great monopolist of fugal falsetto prose.'

Of Bacon, Derby, Oxford, Rutland: 'Imagine any one of those aristocratic personages doing perpetual recasting and revising work for the theatre, yet never being known by Ben Jonson or Heywood to do so!' (*and* is misplaced in printing).

A useful and informing book.

J.O'C.

DIE PASTORALBRIEFE DES HEILIGEN PAULUS, übersetzt und erklärt von Dr. Max Meinertz. (Bonn: Peter Hanstein. Mk. 4.50. Bound, 6.40.)

This, which will be the eighth volume in the complete work, is the third to appear in the new edition of the Catholic series of Commentaries on the books of the New Testament published in Germany under the general editorship of Dr. Tillmann. Dr. Meinertz, who has been known for many years as a very capable exegete, is the author of the volume, and it shows the same