

## **REVIEW: A SCOTS PARLIAMENT**

*Janet Paisley*

James Roberston, **A Scots Parliament**, Kettlebrig, Fife: Itchy Coo, 128pp, £6.99, ISBN 1 902927 43 5

I mind a wee cousin, lost in the wuids, wha telt his worrit mither when she fund him that he wasnae lost. Thinking he mibbe did ken the road hame, she asked if he coulda gotten back but the bairn had nae notion whit direction his hoose was in. Then ye wur lost, she telt him. The wean glowered. Naw I wasnae, he gied back. I wis here.

So ye nicht wonder dae we need tae ken the road we've traivelled tae ken whaur we are. In **A Scots Parliament**, yin ae they new books fae the Itchy Coo imprent, writer James Roberston fairly thinks we dae. He gangs back ower gey near aicht hunner year tae track the road taen fae the first recordit uise ae the word tae the parliament we hae noo in the hert o Edinburgh. It's a lang road an a gey sair yin at times wi a wheen o airm twistin, buck passin an jiggery-pokery along the wey. But whiles thur wis hert-steerin determinations fur guid governance tae.

Tellin us 'The custom in Scotland wis that if the King wantit siller, he had tae speir for it, and he had tae explain whit he wantit it for' Robertson minds oan James I yaisin siller gied him tae pey aff his ransom oan buildin the palace at Lithgay an bonny furnishings fur his ither hooses, and feenishes 'By 1428 Parliament had had enough and widna vote him nae mair siller.'

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### *Scottish Affairs*

Thur was ay some stramash atween king an coonsel yit the same James said 'Wi God's help, if he grant me life, even if it be the life o a dug, I will gar the key keep the castle an the bracken bush keep the coo.' Parliament had its ain ideas oan keepin folk lawfu. Gey early oan, in 1436, booze was cracked doon oan in yin Act whit said 'The king and the thre estatis has ordanyt that na man in burghe be fundyn in tavernys at wyne, aile or beir efter the straik of ix houris and the bell that salbe rongyn in the said burghe.' Bevvyn efter nine a'clock got ye a nicht in the jile.

Nae doot folk wur luiked efter, laws made an tax gethered afore 1235 but, gien thur wasnae ower muckle written doon till thon time, no that's still aroon, Robertson maks his stertin pynt thonder. In they days, the king cried parliament thegither, a getherin that consistit o the high heid yins amang the spiritual faithers an the tap dugs fae the aristocracy. A hunner year oan, Robert the Bruce cried in folk tae represent the toon cooncils an aw, makin up the weel-kent Three Estates.

The book gies a guid accoont ae the travails, times the King hud the whip haun, times the parliament taen a grup oan it. Intae aw they political machinations, Robertson steers a guid haunfy weel-kent stories. Ye come ower protestant Jenny Geddes wha's kent fur hurlin her stool at the Bishop's heid gin he daured say mass at her lug an Kate Douglas wha, lackin a metal baur, yaised her airm tae bar the door atween king an his assassins. The ill-endit Captain Porteous, hinged by bleezin mad Edinburgh folks fur cairryin oot a neck-streechin oan a smuggler they thoct weel o, mindit me oan mair recent crowds bayin roon a polis van tae git thur hauns oan a young wummin. Gien this was afore trial determined ony guilt, we nicht weel hae gaun backworst tae yon rough justice or mibbe furrin tae nane at aw.

**A Scots Parliament** is fu o they kinna stories whit I was learnt as a wean in the hoose, at school, kirk or Brownies. Seein oor ain history lang since fell oota favour, it's grand tae see it brocht back an retelt in guid readable Scots. Gin we're here, we ay hae tae come at oor histray fae the wrang end, backside furrin. Robertson, tae, comes at it yon wey roond, a lang road wyndin furrin tae democracy. But fae the accoontin o calvinism, covenanters, socialism and the mony ither rebellions that haudit oantae notions o pooer risin up raiter than haudit doon, ye kin jalouse the Scots gene was ay infectit wi a faur aulder notion. It's no the book's purpose tae gang intae ancient tribal custom but thonder nicht gie reason why Scots thraw fur tae haud nae body higher

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nor anither, baur the folk gie thaim leave an, if they're no suitin, tak it awa again.

Bringin awthing up tae date, Winnie Ewing is quotit kickin aff the stertin session that brocht back political pooer wi the words: 'The Scottish parliament, adjourned on the twenty-fifth day of March 1707, is hereby reconvened.' Robertson minds us that, whiles yon adjournment lastit nigh three hunner year, yince awbody could vote it only taen the last seeventy fur folk tae turn the Articles o Union oan thur heid an git back the richt tae mak their ain decisions. Wi forty acts passed in three year, he coonts it nae bad thing tae hae oor ain parliament an nae worst thing tae waant mair guid fur awbody fae it. Pyntin oot we dinna hae tae cowp Westminster noo, he quotes Mrs Howden fae Sir Walter Scott's 1736 novel **The Heart of Midlothian**. 'When we had Parliament-men o our ain, we could aye peeble them wi stanes when they werena gude bairns.' Maks ye wonder wha'd be an msp.

Robertson does twa things here, baith ae thum political. He mends the broken threid whit shewed us tae oor past. By daen that he gies us back a straucht story, a kennin whaur we cam fae that kin learn us the wey furrin fae whaur we are noo. Alangside that, he leads us doon the road back intae oor Lowland Scots mither tongue. A land whit maks muckle o its richt tae speak fur itsell cannae be hauden tae anither fur the language tae screive its future wi.

Folk mak the words needit tae talk aboot thersells. Tak that awa an ye are ay translatit intae somethin else, torn awa frae histray, culture an custom. Kennin nae torn up thing kin growe new shoots, the Itchy Coo impreent sets aboot freeing oor tongues an learning oor een tae ken again the language whit we speak. **A Scots Parliament** doesnae dress ower muckle up yit, fur aw folk didnae ay hae the whip haund in yon auld sang, and micht no in the new, it has catcht the speerit parliament stauns fur. Mair, by firmin the grund we staun oan, it gies back life tae oor roots.

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