

LETTERS

Help wanted to cast light on one of our sons

SIR.—The writers of articles in "The Press and Journal" on the Doric and the historic North-east are generally agreed that rapid development and changes in society are inevitably bringing the life of the Doric.

In a recent article by Mr R. Watts on the Aberdeen bard William Anderson, Mr Watt ended with the wistful expression "I can't think why he (and other Scottish bards) seems to have been forgotten."

Much as the gradual disappearance of the Doric is to be regretted. There is one important aspect which has to be considered, viz., the indifference and apathy of the people themselves to this loss.

At the 1967 conference of the Scottish Library Association a literary authority of Aberdeen University stated: "I am continually surprised to find how little serious interest Scots have taken in the Scottish past at every level. During the present century the study of Scottish history in Scotland has been disgracefully retarded. I believe that the communities which best maintain their individuality in the modern world are those whose people take a keen interest in their own corporate past. So often this interest is frustrated for lack of documentation."

Raw deal

Another literary authority, Cuthbert Graham, writing about the recently published "Oxford Book of Scottish Verse," stated that it had given a raw deal to the 19th century poets and he lamented the omission of several North-east poets. He stressed the omission of our gifted son of Aberdeen, William Thom, the Inverurie Weaver Poet, who was represented in the "Oxford Book of English Verse" by the lyric "The Blind Boy's Pranks," and now is entirely dropped.

I make no apology for referring at length to William Thom, as I have recently

completed a biography of this acclaimed Scottish poet, for we have here an instance of the indifference and unjust treatment given to some of our bards of Bon-Accord. William Thom has often been grossly misunderstood and badly recorded by earlier writers, and a newer and truer appraisal of his life and work is essential if justice is to be done and the real worth of the poet and man expressed.

It can now be shown that this is so from results of careful research and the discovery of a series of hitherto unknown original letters by the poet to my grandfather, William Bruce of Inverurie, together with other authentic records in my possession.

Gifted son

William Thom settled in Inverurie in 1840 with his very young family, and there he met my grandfather, and from that time until the death of the poet they were very close friends. During the time the poet was in London, this friendship was continued by correspondence and by visits by the poet to my grandfather in Inverurie. Much of the poet's life and work is now revealed for the first time. And the subject is dealt with in the compassionate light of modern thought rather than intolerant tradition.

This belated biography throws a new and discerning light on the life of the poet, fills in many of the blank spaces in the picture of the man and his times, and rightly enhances the character and genius of this gifted son of Aberdeen who has been placed unmistakably in the front of Scotland's minor poets. It gives many of the poet's most beautiful specimens of our Scottish muse which have endeared him to the hearts of his countrymen.

Support is required for the publication of this book, which will cost under £1, and orders for copies should be intimated to Messrs A. P. Reid & Son, 28 Market Street, Aberdeen, who have arranged to carry out this work if sufficient support is given. Appeals for support have been issued by Dr W. Douglas Simpson and by Dr W. R. Aitkin of the University of Strathclyde, and I have also been encouraged and helped in this work by several leading authorities in the literature and history of the North-east.—Robert Bruce, 15 Deneaton, Co.

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