

**THE FREE LANCE BOOKS,
IV; WE MODERNS:
ENIGMAS AND GUESSES**

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The Free Lance Books, IV; We Moderns: Enigmas and Guesses by Edwin Muir

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EDWIN MUIR

**THE FREE LANCE BOOKS,
IV; WE MODERNS:
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EDITED WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY H. L. MENCKEN

WE MODERNS:

ENIGMAS AND GUESSES

By EDWIN MUIR



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CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION, 7
- I. THE OLD AGE, 25
- II. ORIGINAL SIN, 69
- III. WHAT IS MODERN? 103
- IV. ART AND LITERATURE, 145
- V. CREATIVE LOVE, 185
- VI. THE TRAGIC VIEW, 225

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INTRODUCTION

That a young Scotsman, reacting from the vast emotional assault of the late ferocious war, should have withdrawn himself into an ivory tower in Glasgow town, and there sat himself down in heroic calm to wrestle with the vexatious and no doubt intrinsically insoluble problems of being and becoming — this was surely nothing to cause whispers among connoisseurs of philosophical passion, for that grim, persistent, cold-blooded concern with the fundamental mysteries of the world has been the habit of the Scots ever since they emerged from massacre and blue paint. From blue paint, indeed, the transition was almost instantaneous to blue souls, and the conscience of Britain, such as it is, has dwelt north of the Cheviot Hills ever since. Find a Scot, and you are at once beset by a metaphysician, or, at all events, by a theologian. But for a young man of those damp, desolate parts, throwing himself into the racial trance, to emerge with a set of ideas reaching back, through

INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche and even worse heretics, to the spacious, innocent, somewhat gaudy days of the Greek illumination — for such a fellow, so bred and circumscribed, to come out of his tower with a concept of life as a grand and glittering adventure, a tremendous spectacle, an overpowering ecstasy, almost an orgy — such a phenomenon was, and is, quite sufficient to lift the judicious eyebrow. Yet here is this Mr. Edwin Muir of Caledonia bearing just that outlandish contraband, offering just that strange flouting of all things traditionally Scotch. What he preaches in the ensuing aphorisms is the emancipation of the modern spirit from its rotting heritage of ingenuous fears and exploded certainties. What he denounces most bitterly is the abandonment of a world that is beautifully surprising and charming to the rule of sordid, timid and unimaginative men — the regimentation of ideas in a system that is half a denial of the obvious and half a conglomeration of outworn metaphors, all taken too literally. And what he pleads for most eloquently, with his cold, reserved northern eloquence, is the whole-hearted acceptance of “life as a sacrament, . . . life as joy triumphing over fate, . . . life made innocent, . . .