

saint, looking out into the dizzy air, a pair of folded hands praying to the bright immediate heavens, a sandalled monkish foot planted on the edge of the white abyss. And then, besides this mighty world of the great Cathedral itself, you possess the view of all green Lombardy—vast, lazy Lombardy, resting from its Alpine upheavals." Or observe James when, somewhat less impassioned but more witty, more worldly, he represents the speaker in "The Sweetheart of M. Brisieux" as wondering what Brisieux in his boyhood thought of the dull pictures in the gallery of his native town. "Conjecture was pertinent, for it was in these crepuscular halls that this deeply original artist must have heard the first early bird-notes of awakening genius: first, half credulously, as we may suppose, on festal Sundays, with his hand in his father's, gazing, rosy and wide-eyed, at the classical wrath of Achilles and sallow flesh-tints of Dido; and later, with his hands in his pockets, an incipient critical frown, and the mental vision of an Achilles somehow more in earnest and a Dido more deeply desirable." These two passages in themselves contain all the seeds of James's later manner. Already he had been taken with his desire for the luxuriant atmosphere of "Europe"; already he was learning to set it forth delicately, impeccably. We have but to turn to the story "At Isella" to see him working toward another aspect of his later method, for there his narrator, moving down to Milan, casually meets a lady who is running away from her husband to join a lover more delectable. The meeting is the "germ" of such story as there is; a drama is caught flying, as it were, and cherished, under tender and deliberate hands rounded into fine proportions. His art, already maturing, had met artlessness and had immensely profited by the encounter.

Convention That Does Not Convene

Convention and Revolt in Poetry. By John Livingston Lowes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

THIS book is a considered utterance, by an established American scholar recently appointed to a chair of literature in one of our leading universities, upon an urgent literary problem of the present time. It has the charm of a fine zest and allusiveness, and it freshly illuminates the technique of poetic expression, mainly in the three chapters (V, VI, VII) devoted to recent verse. These chapters constitute the broadest and fairest treatment of the subject we have yet seen. Mr. Lowes sees that there is now proceeding, in the wake of the great Romantic movement, a needful revision of the diction of poetry. During the height of the Romantic movement, he says, "the vocabulary of poetry increased enormously its store of words of heightened emotional associations, of vague splendors, of richly sensuous suggestion. The diction of poetry became, with notable exceptions, opulent, sumptuous, lavish, rather than pointed, terse, concrete. And this very opulence of diction—at its best one of the glories of English poetry—tended to confuse the issue for the Romanticists' successors." The result was that "poetry became, as practiced by its minor acolytes, the haunt of slumberous glooms, and verdurous gleams, and murmurous darks and deeps. And so there arose a new conventional diction, less crass but more insidious than that of the eighteenth century. . . . And now against that, in turn, the inevitable reaction has set in. It finds its most sharply defined expression in the principles and practices of the Imagists, to whom, however, it is by no means confined. They merely happen to be the most articulate among the groups. . . . And the time was undoubtedly ripe for just such a revolt. The pruning-hook was needed, and though it is often used by dreadfully inept and ruthless hands, the stock is strong enough to stand it, and to grow more vigorously for the lopping." Mr. Lowes finds the new poetry chiefly significant in so far as it seeks "the exact word which conveys the writer's *impression* to the reader." But he makes clear that this valuable effort at renovating the diction of verse has been accompanied by considerable limi-

tation of rhythmic beauty, and by very great loss of constructive power. Although in cultivating the field of strophic rhythm "the serious practitioners of *vers libre* are making contributions of genuine significance to English poetry," they are not, as exponents are prone to assume, really founding a new and independent tradition in verse. "The great strophic rhythms of 'Paradise Lost,' for example, which are far more significant than the rhythms of Milton's *lines*, are as free as the strophic rhythms of any poem in *vers libre*. The sentence and phrasal rhythms of the great rhymed lyrics are always potentially, and in many cases actually, as unrestrained as the modern cadences." A still more important point for our practitioners to face is the inalienable value of poetic construction. Their quest for "externality and immediacy of impression," while it has done much to renovate diction, has come to be regarded as a substitute for constructional thinking; so that the rank and file of versifiers are turning out "preliminary sketches" for finished works.

Mr. Lowes's treatment of his central theme, however, is radically confused. Quite unwittingly, it seems, he has attempted an impossible task: to erect a critical view of poetic convention upon a romantic view of human life. He views life as a continuous ebb and flow of incalculable forces, in which the controlling will and judgment of humanity have negligible functions, and in which the individual is at best a lusty swimmer striking out for undefined shores. Mr. Lowes's incessant zest in painting what he calls "the inevitable flux," "the endless flux," of life and of poetry seems now, in Touchstone's phrase, "something stale." So does the kind of "superb individualism" which Mr. Lowes celebrates. He seems oblivious of the part which it has played in bringing on our current woes. For example, commenting on Shelley's "The desire of the moth for the star," Mr. Lowes pronounces this notable verse "a poignant and unforgettable expression of one of the deepest truths of human life." Now the romantic longing of a human heart, keen and pathetic though it be, simply is not "one of the deepest truths of human life." Nor should a critic so anxious as our present author to connect his theme with the contemporary situation of human life entirely forget the anti-social impetus which worked disguisedly in the Shelleyan longings. Mr. Lowes even iterates the Byronic view of that Satanic majesty whom the Romanticists enthroned in the impossible position of the "hero" of *Paradise Lost*. The actual truth of the matter is of course that Milton thought that "superb" individual virtues can win a really positive value only in so far as they are subordinated to that higher will and judgment which work discernibly through human affairs; that otherwise those virtues become progressively negative and destructive—in a word, they become Satanic.

The height of paradox is to attempt a demonstration, from the standpoint of romantic tradition, of the value of human convention. For surely convention, if it has any positive reality at all, is the endeavor of mankind through corporate experiment to develop, and to embody in literary and political and other institutions, its higher will and judgment. Particular conventions are regulative judgments—the bulk of them, so far, sadly inadequate—which we have imposed upon the flux of our imaginations and emotions. But for Mr. Lowes in his historical review of them (Chapters I to IV), conventions are products of that flux itself, with very little, if any, agency of human judgment. They are produced by the strivings of that flux to "catch and fix" itself in form (compare pages 4 and 338). This process seems to the reviewer no less miraculous than that of lifting oneself by one's own boot-straps. Equally romantic, in Mr. Lowes's account, is the disappearance of conventions when outworn. They simply dispose of themselves, apparently, as Sir Toby's boots were to "hang themselves in their own straps" when they should prove not fine enough to get drunk in; though like Spenser's old man Despair, on the other hand, they continually come to life again by their own agency, and can survive countless hangings. But surely, to the eye of common sense, the continual spectacle of human revolt

from old conventions provides some testimony to the effectualness of human judgment. For though we often spurn conventions which ought not to die, and cherish others which ought never to be alive, we do in the long run pronounce and execute judgment upon those that ought to be dead. For example, some irrational conventions in the political sphere, inherited from the Middle Ages, have been decisively sepulchred during the past two centuries, and there is good reason to hope that extinction will presently be conferred upon certain which still persist. Who would deny that cumulative human judgment, not some incalculable "evolution," has proved itself the central factor in this process? A parallel situation appears in the sphere of poetry. The irrational poetic conventionalism of the Middle Ages, taken by and large, is dead. The rational poetic conventions of the Greeks and Romans, revived and qualified by the Renaissance, are established by and large in the best modern judgments. Now, this cardinal fact in the story of conventions is simply omitted by Mr. Lowes. It is natural that he should draw his illustrations largely from the Middle Ages. It is perhaps natural that he should be interested in demonstrating the persistence, at the present day, of romantic and irrational modes of poetic convention. But when he omits the outstanding fact of the advance of modern over mediæval poetic judgment, and maintains as a whole truth the half-truth that "conventions are irrational," he cannot claim the attitude of an impartial observer. For in short, from his viewpoint, convention simply will not convene.

To be sure, our author's judgments in detail are often better than his general philosophy. But, unfortunately, they are so thoroughly interwoven with it that the total pattern is one of extraordinary paradox. There are interspersed passages to remind us that "standards of values are fixed, not by you and not by me, but by the taciturnity of time"; that "underneath the inevitable flux there are permanencies"; that the "essence of art is restraint" and that the artist's endeavor should be "to give to the amorphous welter form." But such advice, on top of "the amorphous welter" of the author's view of life, is too ironical. It is as though Neptune, poking his head above the seas which he has roused, should remark to the laboring ship, "You really ought to hold a straight course, instead of tossing about so." That one's best course amounts simply to drifting with the current is surely the general conviction that naïve readers, and college classes, must derive from passages like the following: "Any revolt—this, that, or the other—is merely one of the countless waves of action and reaction between which the arts, like life, perpetually swing to and fro, and through an occasional ground-swell, sometimes farther on." Again, "The world and art alike move on through what, in the main, is a continuous evolution, punctuated by the sudden flaming or flowering of a crucial moment now and then. For in poetry, as in the State, it is after all a constitutional régime, tempered by occasional revolution, that remains the least objectionable mode that has been found of muddling through. The amazing scheme of things of which we find ourselves a part demands both conservatives and radicals as indispensable instruments of its unfolding." So far from helping us to conceive a better mode than that of "muddling through," Mr. Lowes with his "countless waves of action and reaction" leaves standing very slight foundation for the "constitutional régime" which he conventionally commends. In the tossing time in which we live, his superficial advocacy of convention, together with his implicit nullification of it, gives exactly the wrong conjunction. The right conjunction is just the other way around. We need a firm grasp of the fundamental truth and value of convention, together with a clear summoning of particular conventions to the bar of the best human judgment. The literary scholars and teachers in our colleges can best serve us by clearly demonstrating, instead of paradoxically minimizing, the function of free human judgment in the shaping and reshaping of convention.

War and the Air

Air Men o' War. By Boyd Cable. E. P. Dutton and Company.
Night Bombing with the "Bedouins." By Lieut. Robert H. Reece. Houghton Mifflin Company.

The Way of the Eagle. By Major Charles J. Biddle. Charles Scribner's Sons.

"Pat" Crowe, Aviator. By Lieut. James R. Crowe. Montreal and New York: N. L. Brown.

The Fledgling. By Charles Bernard Nordhoff. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Sky Fighters of France: Aerial Warfare 1914-1918. By Lieut. Henry Farré. Englished by Catherine Rush. Houghton Mifflin Company.

THE literature which deals with that once undiscovered country, the sky, is still, in its non-technical aspect, entirely composed of war reminiscences. It is not surprising that it should emphasize the flyer rather than the region in which he flies. Nevertheless the point to which this emphasis is carried is at times irritating. Readers who open a volume with some hope for a taste of the superb panorama and strange exhilaration which flight must give are buried under a trivial narrative of the squadron mess, of night scrambles from the bombs of "Boches," or, at best, descriptions of aerial combats in terms of the number of yards at which the aviator began firing, the jamming of a machine-gun, and the escape of one or the other of the combatants by certain acrobatic manoeuvres. Too rarely does the scenic or dramatic word break this technical recitative. One cause for this is fairly obvious. "You don't get time to think," says Mr. Boyd Cable for the flyer. "If you stop to think, you're dead." The intense absorption of the aerial fighter in the business of fighting doubtless accounts for the frequent flatness of his narrative.

Mr. Cable himself does not suffer from such a handicap. He has been, he admits, no more than an aerial passenger. From long association with flyers at the British front he has gathered a number of flying incidents which give an interesting and comprehensive picture of the work of the Royal Air Forces. His stories preserve memorable exploits, piquant human characteristics, impressive victories and tragedies. They unfortunately suffer from the spirit of propaganda in which the author seeks to "make plain how vital to success a strong Air Force is." Instead of open-mouthed admiration of the British flyers, one feels a genuine impatience with them, and a good deal of respect for the Germans who, though they are apparently always having twenty machines destroyed by three English aviators who escape with scarcely a scratch, can still marshal the tremendous odds which Mr. Cable requires for narrative purposes. One feels, too, beneath the racy readability of these tales a lurking second-handness throughout. The associate of flyers has not in this instance given, perhaps cannot give, the impression of reality which the aviator himself can impart.

This first-hand quality shines through the last chapter of Lieut. Robert Reece's little book. The volume as a whole is inadequate as a record of night flying. Irrelevant personalities fill too many of its few pages. Nevertheless the description of "Mystery Dick," who, rejected as a flyer and put to observing, has his pilot killed and flies the great and unfamiliar Handley-Page safely to the earth, gives a vivid picture of night flying, in which "lights or stars rushed at us or receded or whirled about," and "Time and Distance became mere words without meaning."

The author of "Pat Crowe, Aviator," a series of letters from French flying fields, adds some charming episodes of the sky to our store, and doubtless his record would have been of surpassing interest but for his death at the advanced training field near Issoudun. "Jacqueline of the Chateau," a pastel of light but serious narrative, and the episode of "little Jeanne d'Arc" rising on tiptoe in her wooden shoes to kiss the skyman who makes a forced landing among her herds, are promises of what