Urban or Bucolic?

THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY. By CHARLES DOWNING LAY. New York: Duffield & Co. 1926. $1.00.

A BUCOLIC ATTITUDE. By WALTER PRICHARD EATON. The same.

Reviewed by H. W. BOYNTON

THIS is an odd pair of booklets, if it can be called a pair. The author of the first is a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and ardently exalts the place where landscape is not or nearly not. The author of the second is (or is best known as) a dramatic critic, and writes here like a country gentleman. Mr. Eaton has the advantages of being a professional writer, and of appearing in rebuttal. Mr. Lay wrote his book in praise of the city and then the publishers asked Mr. Eaton to speak for the country, with the Lay argument directly in mind.

Mr. Lay writes awkwardly, as an advocate piling up points rather than as a lover of the city discoursing on the charms of his mistress. He also writes intemperately. He commits the cardinal error of building his praise of one thing on dispraise of another. On the whole, our impression is that he isn't quite comfortable in his own mind about the status of the city as against the country. He protests too much, strains too many points in favor of his client. Why should his liking for New York make him so short with people who prefer living elsewhere? The truth is, his book is primarily a defense of the city and, but for a perfunctory word or two at the outset, he will say nothing good of the country.

People, he begins, object to the city because it is crowded; but this is the great virtue of a city. Crowds mean coöperation and specialized service. Your chores are all done for you in the city. Your heat, your light, your snow-shoveling are all lumped into the rent. Moreover, "there are within a thousand feet of 42nd Street and Broadway, New York, 56,000 seats in theatres and in the whole city 96,000 seats." In such dreary and discouraging data, Mr. Lay's spirit rejoices; and he will not admit that there are any benefits to make up for them outside of city limits. "Think" (he breathes with a sort of reverent wonder), "think, for instance, what a yell from a city window will bring. First a policeman, then firemen, and an ambulance with its doctor and nurse. What use to yell in the country?" Well, one use is that you can yell in the country without fetching any of those functionaries. The welkin is yours, one of your luxuries, and you ask no man's permission to make it ring. But this is wasting yells, from Mr. Lay's point of view.

The short of it is, that upon the sound premise that city people need not apolgize for liking to live in the city, he builds a heavy and lopsided argument against the country. In his use, as Mr. Eaton is quick to remark, the terms city and country have little meaning. When he says city, he means one city, New York; and when he says country he means something quite below the average of life as now lived, outside of New York City, by really quite a few millions of contented citizens.

Mr. Eaton's book was occasioned by Mr. Lay's; but as he admits in his "Foreword," is less controversial than autobiographical. It is a very pretty piece of familiar writing, in which the writer applies the touchstone of his personal experience to the case in point. After a good many years of life in the city—Mr. Lay's City—years which brought him to the verge of a nervous breakdown, Mr. Eaton took a house in Stockbridge, and began to enjoy life. Later he bought a mountainside farm in the Berkshires, and busied himself making over an old house to his taste. The bulk of this book is a description of his makings and doings in this country setting, almost as circumstantial as that with which Mr. Hergesheimer has recently edified his public.

As for the matter of city vs. country, Mr. Eaton does not treat it as ground for heated argument. He gently suggests three or four tolerably patent facts. The first is that what is true of New York is not true of American cities in general: "I could take a New Yorker to twenty cities where he would be almost as completely miserable as he would be living up here where I live, in the Berkshire Hills." Another is that you get vastly more space and comfort for your money, indoors and out, in the country than in the city. And another is the country-dweller is as free to get the city when he wants it, as the city-dweller is to get the country—a fact which Mr. Lay disingenuously suppresses. Finally he touches on that mysterious call or pull of the land, that passion for breathing-space and elbow-room which still keeps so many millions (rather against Mr. Lay's advice) in the country: "I know that when one of them gives up his ancestral home for an Upper West Side flat, gives up the plow handles for the bank clerk's pen, gives up the sight of our mountain for the movies, gives up the freedom of the country for the cramped restlessness of the city, he is giving up something fine and precious. What he gets in return may quite compensate him. That, after all, is a personal matter."

A Strayed Cavalier

IS 5. By E. E. CUMMINGS. New York: Boni and Liveright. 1926. $2.50.

Reviewed by GLENN HUGHES
University of Washington

THE volume under consideration is not a mathematical treatise; it is a series of experiments in typography. The author has very generously used up a number of his lyric poems in the process, and if he is not prosecuted by the anti-vivisectionists it will merely show that the feelings of a poem are not held in the same reverence as those of a kitten.

Is it necessary to state that Mr. Cummings is one of the most brilliant young American poets? Two previous collections of his poems (not to mention the recent *Dial* Award) are proof enough of his unusual skill in the matter of putting words together to create a sensation. His sophisticated wit ranks him with T. S. Eliot, his audacity, with Ezra Pound. One might go on like this for some time, comparing him with those to whom he is obviously indebted, but it will perhaps be sufficient to mention Gertrude Stein, the world's most famous stutterer, and the Cavalier Poets, whose subtle blending of erudition with frivolity might easily win for them the title of "the Eliots and Cummingses of the seventeenth century."

It must have been quite apparent to many readers that in the best of his early lyrics Mr. Cummings was reviving, and with indisputable success, the mannerisms of Marvell, Suckling, Herrick, and Carew. He even intensified their preciosity. "And your quaint honor turn to dust" sounds like Cummings, but actually is Marvell. "The liquefaction of her clothes" is a familiar line from Herrick, but how Mr. Cummings would like to have written it! And he almost could have, for he is clever. In "Puella Mea," his most pretentious *poème d'amour*, he set down line after line of exquisite gallantry. He pressed his adjectives too hard, but still he created a charming poem. Its movement was not too stiffly metrical, its punctuation only slightly perverse. And several of the sonnets in the same volume achieved nearly as fine an effect. But the mood which inspired them has now vanished. Herrick has been returned to the shelf, and courtliness cast aside as an outworn cloak.

It is not strange that a young man should exhibit a passion for seventeenth century poetry, nor that he should try in his modest way to improve upon it. It is not even strange that a clever young man should exploit his cleverness by means of mechanical trickery. But it is strange, not to say disconcerting, that a clever young man should grow into his tricks rather than out of them. Yet that is just what Mr. Cummings has done. In his new book he has descended to the very depths of type-arrangement. He has done his level best to give a flat poem point by twisting it into a puzzle. Followers of W. Somerset Maugham's fiction will recall the asinine Mrs. Albert Forrester, who "was able to get every ounce of humor out of the semi-colon." What a trivial and uninspired person she seems beside Mr. Cummings!

As I have already indicated, one could forgive the author of these poems his exasperating humor of punctuation did he offer as reward any richness of thought or feeling. But in "is 5" the form too often is an empty shell. There are in the collection a few lyrics with the biting quality of Sandburg's realistic sketches, and there are others (dealing with the banalities of American life) that George Jean Nathan might have written in his sleep after dining on rarebit and moonshine at a Negro cabaret. Again, we are given the portraits of "Five Americans." All five of them are prostitutes. (This particular humorous device is so out-moded that one is embarrassed at meeting it again.) Finally we are presented with disjointed monologues in New Yorkese. The manner of Milt Gross for the manner of Herrick—that is the metamorphosis of Mr. Cummings.

I know artists are always saying that a good painting looks as well upside down as any other way. And it may be true. The question now arises: does the same principle apply to a poem? But it is not necessary to answer the question; if a poem is good, people will gladly stand on their heads to read it. It is conceivable, if not probable, that the favorite poetic form of the future will be a sonnet arranged as a cross-word puzzle. If there were no other way of getting at Shakespeare's sonnets than by solving a cross-word puzzle sequence, I am sure the puzzles would be solved and the sonnets enjoyed. But what about Mr. Cummings? Can his poems surmount such obstacles? Well, perhaps if they cannot survive as poems they can survive as puzzles.

No, the book is not a mathematical treatise, yet it has an equation for a title. The author tells us explicitly in his introduction that he is not trying to be original, that he is but demonstrating once again the "purely irresistible truth" that two times two is five. Thus the subtlety of the title lies not in its significance but in its abbreviated form. The danger in such an abbreviation should be apparent to the author: in these days of prodigious child poets it is misleading for the jacket of a book to carry the legend, "E. E. Cummings is 5." I am sure he is older than that.

Anguish and Rebellion

THE LEPER SHIP. By ISADORE LHEVINNE. New York: The Halcyon Books. 1926. $2.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

THE three short stories in this volume are all grim, powerful, and as unpleasant as life. The title story deals with an ill-fated refugee ship from Vladivostock, a mysterious nameless wreck of a ship which appears from no one knows where, takes on its cargo of human derelicts, and sails away for Shanghai. Amid the defeated humanity on board there is one radiant figure, a young and beautiful girl; she is found to have contracted leprosy and is murdered; gradually the ship becomes a shambles of disease, terror, and crime. Badly captained, it wanders from its path to Manila, where it is refused entrance, thence back to Hongkong with the same result; finally it starts wearily for San Francisco. But long ere this the leper ship has entered a timeless realm of horror; the seas which it sails are those of the Flying Dutchman and the Ancient Mariner; it has become a floating segment of Hell where the voyagers, isolated from past and future, suffer a purposeless eternal punishment.

The same sense of irretrievable doom dominates "The Visitor" which narrates the vain attempt of a talented Russian Jew to escape his racial heritage. Having come to America, supplied himself with a convenient Spanish ancestry, and obtained a professorship in an American college, he has broken all external ties with his past only to have it surge up within him and clutch him by the throat at the touch of a letter of denunciation from his dying father. Strange irrational forces, rooted in his organism, overthrow the fine intellect and hurry him into madness.

Slightly less despairing but also less powerful is "The Lost Youth." One is tempted to suspect from the careless printing of the whole volume that the article crept into this title by mistake; at any rate, the story deals with the tragi-comic theme of all lost youth, not with the trivial question, "where is my wandering boy tonight?" The tragi-comedy is that of a middle-aged high school teacher in New York City who falls in love with one of his pupils, a flapper from the Jewish East Side. The pitiful capers of second adolescence are revealed mercilessly but the author is too good a psychologist to attribute them entirely to a physical basis. The desire of the tired bachelor for a home and domestic responsibilities underlies and outlives the sexual infatuation and finds some solace at the end in caring for the family of the Jewess while she herself journeys onward and downward.

Mr. Lhevinne is at his best in the mood of defiance that governs most of his work. "The Leper Ship" and "The Visitor" are cries of unyielding anguish. The style writhes and quivers with scorn, hatred, unavailing rebellion. Realistic so far as frequently to pass into the disgusting, his

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scenes are nevertheless marked by an intensity which detaches them from local time and place and gives them a symbolic value. The evil that triumphs nearly everywhere is intangible, formless, a kind of seething mass of instincts, desires, and habits that drives his characters to destruction. He sees a world of men and women fighting against themselves, slain by themselves or by the powers of chaos in themselves. One may wish that there were more cosmos in Mr. Lhevinne's philosophy, but a living chaos is better than a dead cosmos. And Mr. Lhevinne's chaos is most terribly alive.

Swinging Romance

BEAU SABREUR. By PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1926. $2.

WE (or, at least, that part of us which is this review) have not read "Beau Geste," Major Wren's previous tale of the African Desert. But "Beau Sabreur," his latest romance, is so exciting, so exceptional a tale of adventure, that we shall make haste to repair the gap and, further, to read everything else the author has written. Let there be no misunderstanding. "Beau Sabreur" is not a good book in any reasonable literary sense of the description. It bears the same kind of relationship to, say, one of Conrad's novels as a newspaper account of a dog fight bears to "Paradise Regained." Considered as a piece of writing it is crude and raw: in spite of the author's preface, a plea to undermine the reader's disbelief, we insist on regarding the Major's story as an improbable impossibility. He swears that "it all actually happened." What "it"—the story—is let no reviewer attempt to tell. Sufficient to say that for sheer ingenuity the present writer knows none to match it. Major Wren piles up his surprises, Pelion on Ossa, and interest follows him breathlessly to the last page.

His book is in the grand manner of military romance and yet arouses everything that the best kind of detective story arouses in the mind of the reader. What though the gallant Major's chapters are continually brought to a close with the phrase "All very interesting . . ."—his book is one more proof that the tale's the thing, that lack of humor, poor writing, indifferent psychology, a snobbish and priggish hero, an affected and silly heroine, and all else, may still be forgiven when they merely serve to further a clever and exciting story. We unreservedly recommend "Beau Sabreur" as one of the most eminently readable books of recent years. And—virtue of virtues—it is completely unpretentious.

Four hundred teachers throughout the United States recently reported the ten best American books in their estimation to the editor of *The Golden Book*, who publishes the results in the September issue of his magazine. They are as follows:

Twenty-five books by twenty authors received sufficient recognition to be included in the results. Of the first ten Edith Wharton's "Ethan Frome" is the only one of newer vintage than the nineteenth century, and this stands eighth on the list. Edgar Allan Poe's "Tales" and Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" were practically unanimous for first and second position. The first six showed little difference in judgment, but less than half as many picked "The Rise of Silas Lapham," by William Dean Howells, as agreed on Melville's "Moby Dick," respectively seventh and sixth in the ranking.

No author is mentioned twice in the first ten, but Hawthorne and Mark Twain appear each once again in the supplementary list of fifteen where Washington Irving has three books and Henry James two.

This ranking of the considered few is then compared with "box office results" in the form of a list of American books of which a million or more copies have been sold. "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which was tenth on the critics' shelves, "The Virginian" (fourteenth), "Ben Hur" (sixteenth), and "The Call of the Wild" (twentieth) are the only ones to show this mass purchasing power, but by lowering the bars to 750,000 copies "The Scarlet Letter" (No. 2), "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," and "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" (respectively Nos. 3 and 23), "The Last of the Mohicans" (No. 4), and "Rip Van Winkle" (No. 22) are found to meet both qualitative and quantitative analysis in the chemistry of American taste.

The Bowling Green

Precis of a Journey. III.

ONE purpose of this journey was to settle, in the most æsthetic and philosophical manner, an ancient dispute between Madrigal and myself on the relative merits of Scotch and Irish whiskeys. So it is that any account of the adventure at the bridge of Glen Dun must begin at the Refreshment Room of the railway station at Coleraine.

Our host at Milford had given us some valuable pointers on the three most famous Irish distillations —Power's, Jameson's, and Bushmills. To me, Bushmills had always been a name of bright tradition. Madrigal, I think, was inclined to vote for Jameson. But our adviser had rather led us to believe that in Ireland itself Power now holds the palm. (I would not have you interpret these differences too bitterly: one does not make comparisons among goddesses, nor choose a favorite of the three divine Graces.) See us, therefore, when changing trains at Coleraine with half an hour to wait, buying a bottle of Power as laboratory material. The young woman at the Refreshment Bar we imagined a lineal descendant of Kitty in the old ballad. ("When beautiful Kitty one morning was tripping with a pitcher of milk to the fair at Coleraine.") The bottle, duly wrapped, was entrusted to Madrigal's care. It went with us on the tram past the village of Bushmills itself, where we saw the home of that rival fluid wistful in the distance. That wet and chill evening at the Giants' Causeway it came forth once or twice from its parcel for gentlemanly inspection, so that I was well familiar with the shape and size of the package.

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The next morning, in blinks of changing sunshine and shadows, we drove along the Antrim shore. Outpost cliffs of Scotland lay on the horizon, the light changed and rippled on the Irish hills, on the steep granites of Fair Head. In Ballycastle it was market day, we saw pigs bigger and pinker than it had ever occurred to us to imagine. If swine should ever again want a Gadarene setting in which to rush down a steep place into the sea, then Ballycastle is their place. Then we turned off across the peat bogs. That morning is not forgotten. It was too excellent for speech. We sat, tightly compressed in Dan Daly's smart little car, silenced with air and contentment. Then, after those miles of moorland, where the fresh peats are neatly turned up like slabs of chocolate, we dipped into a sudden ravine. There were birch trees, a braying of rooks, and an elfin valley widening to the sea. This was our first glimpse of the glens of Antrim. Down there the village of Cushendun where Moira O'Neill lives. (We imagined we spotted her very house, a white mansy-looking home among trees.) Moira O'Neill, whose Songs of the Glens we had loved so long and most of which Madrigal knows by heart. This was a moment, our instincts told us, for commemoration.

It was high noon; the sun was well over the foreyard, if we took even the tallest of Antrim's mountains for reckoning. We pulled up on the stone bridge, gazing down where the stream hurries. It was one of those collaborations of place and destiny when it is best not to speak one's intentions, but to allow natural good instinct to express itself. I was afoot beside the bulwark of the bridge. I could see Madrigal, sitting tightly wedged in the back seat, rummaging in his pocket. The familiar package emerged. He sat holding it, I stood contemplating him. This, for him even more than for me, was a millennial moment. I wondered what word of Irish magic would be uttered. I myself had only some vague feeling that gratitude should be uttered to the singer of the glens. She would never know that we had paused to look toward her home, had drunk her honor, and had passed on. But so often we know nothing of the nicest things that happen to us. Thus we all hung, pivoted on a crystal pinpoint of eternity, in that nooning sun. The rooks creaked in the treetops, birches and hazels quivered in blue light, the stream glittered in amber sluice.

"Don't you think we ought to do something about Moira?" said Madrigal, looking at me with something quick, bright, even fanatical in his handsome grey eyes.

"I sure do," I said, with my eye on the parcel.

"Well, here's to her!" he cried.

My heart stood still, then leaped against its usually solid moorings. It is a fact; then for perhaps the only time, I felt that smothered spring of the cardiac muscles when the heart gathers itself to jump like a frog. For there, floating past my palsied arm, passing in slow curve, falling a hundred feet to the glen below, was the precious parcel. Our bottle, our laboratory bottle, our bottle (practically full, I remembered) of John Power and Sons, ten years old. Of course Moira O'Neill is a great poet, but I hadn't intended to *sacrifice* the bottle to her, only to drink it in her honor. I gazed in horror over the parapet. Madrigal's mercurial mind, I supposed, had been ungeared by this great moment. But there, thank God, lay the parcel, safe on a little sandy shelf beside the brook. It had not broken.

I could not speak at first, and I still shuddered, for native impulse had almost carried me over the bulkwark in attempt to seize the falling treasure. Yet in a way I admired my friend. Truly this was a notorious gesture. Not I, not I, would have done it. As my blood resumed its pedestrian march I admired him more than ever before. He had made a sacrifice worth while. For how many years had we dreamed of our voyage to Ireland; of the first bottle of Irish whiskey shared on its own sod. I turned to him, aghast, perhaps, but still with an unwilling homage breaking through. After all, the inn at Cushendall was only a mile away. . . .

"Come on then, let's drink it," he said. He was pouring from a different bottle. He had divided the Power into two smaller flasks for convenience of transport. The package for which my heart had leapt was empty.

"Here's to Moira!" he said. "The Power and the Glory."

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That afternoon we walked down Glen Arriff in sudden spangles of sun. We stumbled down the ravine among ferns, bluebells, rhododendrons, and a wheen of flowers and mosses dripping like sponges. In midsummer, I dare say, it is a bit picnicky, but in early June you have it to your lane. There are little falls, and quick iced-tea-colored water in pots and cascades. Below one of the falls is a moist log cabin with colored panes of glass through which you can see the bright curtain of water in queerly melodramatic tints. There is a little tea-barracks below the Glen, where a young woman showed us shamrock growing under a hedge. "And now," she said, with the air of one who had often been spoofed but who was still anxious to get at the truth, "Is Niagara really any bigger than Glen Arriff?"

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

Showing America

(*Continued from page* 49)

nothing irrelevant retained. But the getting up is good. When Kim, the granddaughter, so to speak, of the Show Boat emerges as a stage success of the modern, sophisticated variety in New York, the fabric of the story weakens and pales. The "frail and brittle" life of current New York does not lend itself to local color.

Not so the Mississippi. With the river, Miss Ferber's synthesis is a grand success. We have learned something about story telling (thanks to the high price of space) since the 'nineties, and Miss Ferber uses her experience. The narrative skips adroitly back and forward through three generations, plucking from roaring Chicago and brittle New York only what will best serve as background for the show boat where Elly and Julie perform, while Jo sings spirituals in the galley, Parthy glares over her corsets, Magnolia makes her debut and the river rushes by.

The local colorists of an earlier generation would enjoy, one guesses, "Show Boat," while finding it (like New York) a little brittle, intellectual, "got up." They would be pleased with the "characters," quick to approve such drama as the discovery of Julie's Negro blood, or the comedy of Gaylord's "ef he loves yuh and you love him," and if they should say that it is only local color after all, why so were theirs, so is all local color unless it is something more.

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