

Books and So Forth

By Frederic F. Van de Water (F.F.V.)

THIS is a confession of failure. We have been trying to read D. H. Lawrence's "Women in Love." We have reached page 298 by much painful exertion. We don't know what hidden glories may lie ahead, but possessing the knowledge of what we have managed to get behind us, the thought of reading 250 pages more is too much for us to bear. We've broken down. We're licked. We can go no further.

"Women in Love," we understand, was confiscated at one time by the Society for the Suppression of Vice. All we hope from the depths of a vindictive spirit is that the officials of this organization were obliged to read it all the way through.

Originally, we have been told, Mr. Lawrence's book was issued only in a \$15 edition. This is its first appearance at popular prices. In our present condition, we can think of no more lamentable figure, no person more worthy of human sympathy, than the mortal who paid \$15 for his copy.

"Women in Love" is a composite of dullness, drivel and dirt. The last named element is not that rich, potent, primal soil from which all things spring. It is the sterile, dried, enervated mire of endings rather than beginnings. There is a faint, unwholesome scent of decadence about it. All the while you keep wondering if in a minute or so you won't have to hold your nose.

We can stand plain indecency as well as the next man and perhaps better. We have read "Rabelais," the "Decameron," the "Heptameron," the "Contes Drolatiques." Some day we hope to read them all again. They made us laugh. "Women in Love" is infinitely more reticent, but it makes us gag a little.

"How much cleaner and more dignified to be dead!" one of the characters in "Women in Love" exclaims.

Infinitely.

Up to this point we sound like an indorsement of the Vice Society. We aren't. We don't think for a moment that "Women in Love" is an immoral volume. We don't think that even the weakest spirit could be swerved one millimeter closer to evil by reading it. That is, up to page 298, anyway. Rather, it has almost inspired us to lead a better life. We'd hate, in the ensuing years, to become as weary of the coarse and staple varieties of iniquity as Mr. Lawrence's characters seem to be. Henceforth, moderation in all things will be our motto.

There is nothing in "Women in Love" as immoral as the Vice Society, but then, there never has been in any book we've ever read, for that matter. After all, the only thing that censorship does is keep any one from saying out loud what every one thinks, more or less. We have always felt that the executive or the individual who believes that society must have its

ears stopped or its eyes blindfolded for fear it will fall apart otherwise has a considerably lower opinion of humanity, including himself, than we have.

We don't like "Women in Love" for the same reason that we don't like orchids. There is more beauty in the flowers than in the book, but both of them have the faint, repellent scent of decay about them.

It isn't that flavor of decadence that has caused us to bog down and quit with our job half done. We stopped because one-fourth of the time we hadn't any idea what the characters were talking about and the other three-quarters weren't in the least interested. Up to page 298 we ran across only one drowning and a near-murder, and neither of these appealed to us especially. The rest is conversation.

"I agree," says one character, "that the Wille zur Macht is a base and petty thing. But with the Mino (a cat) it is the desire to bring this female cat into a pure stable equilibrium, a transcendent and abiding rapport with the single male. Whereas, without him, as you see, she is a mere stray, a fluffy, sporadic bit of chaos. It is a Volonté de pouvoir, if you like, a will to ability, taking pouvoir as a verb."

The person quoted above had been, perhaps we ought to explain, bearded with a lapis-lazuli ball in the hand of a woman who seemed to feel that this was the only way she could express her passion for him

adequately. We'd feel that it was this experience that made him talk that way if all the rest of the characters didn't speak quite as obscurely.

And then there's another woman who, in the midst of her escort's half-hearted efforts at courting, proceeded to encourage him by swinging on his jaw. We know little or nothing about the love-life of the English. But we're certain that that sort of thing would never do with us.

Two of Mr. Lawrence's favorite words seem to be "loins" and "thighs," and we'll have to admit that he describes the dresses his women characters wear with meticulous enthusiasm.

As for his direct quotations from his characters, we think Mr. Lawrence thinks he writes conversation like Oscar Wilde.

It may be reality that "Women in Love" deals with and we ourselves may be living all unaware in a world of mid-Victorian sham. But we know what we're going to do this evening. We're going to read an old, red-backed, dripping sentimental book again and gulp like a darned fool over Scrooge and the Cratchits. And then we're going to bed early so that nothing will disturb the entrance of a certain august person over the asbestos logs of our fireplace.

We haven't even the most elemental qualifications for a critic of literature. We still believe in Charles Dickens and Santa Claus.

James Joyce's First Literary Effort

The bibliography Ernest Boyd appends to his scholarly study of "The Irish Literary Renaissance" lists under James Joyce's name only these items: "The Day of the Rabblement," "Chamber Music," "Exiles," "Dubliners," "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" and "Ulysses." Through the courtesy of Mary M. Colum we are permitted to reprint the first item herewith, as being not only of interest to Joyce collectors, but as intrinsically interesting in that it shows Joyce's first quarrel with his confederates in Dublin.

The Day of the Rabblement

NO MAN, said the Nolan, can be a lover of the true or the good unless he abhors the multitude; and the artist, though he may employ the crowd, is very careful to isolate himself. This radical principle of artistic economy applies specially to a time of crisis, and today when the highest form of art has been just preserved by desperate sacrifices, it is strange to see the artist making terms with the rabblement. The Irish Literary Theater is the latest movement of protest against the sterility and falsehood of the modern stage. Half a century ago the note of protest was uttered in Norway, and since then in several countries long and disheartening battles have been fought against the hosts of prejudice and misinterpretation and ridicule. What triumph there has been here and there is due to stubborn conviction, and every movement that has set out heroically has achieved a little. The Irish Literary Theater gave out that it was the champion of progress, and proclaimed war against commercialism and vulgarity. It had partly made good its word and was expelling the old devil, when after the first encounter it surrendered to the popular will. Now, your popular devil is more dangerous than your vulgar devil. Bulk and lungs count for something, and he can gild his speech artly. He has prevailed once more, and the Irish Literary Theater must now be considered the property of the rabblement of the most belated race in Europe.

It will be interesting to examine here. The official organ of the movement spoke of producing European masterpieces, but the matter went no further. Such a project was absolutely necessary. The censorship is powerless in Dublin, and the directors could have produced "Ghosts" or "The Dominion of Darkness" if they chose. Nothing can be done until the forces that dictate public judgment are calmly confronted. But, of

course, the directors are shy of presenting Ibsen, Tolstoy or Hauptmann, where even "Countess Cathleen" is pronounced vicious and damnable. Even for a technical reason this project was necessary. A nation which never advanced so far as a miracle play affords no literary model to the artist, and he must look abroad. Earnest dramatists of the second rank, Sudermann Bjornson and Giacosa, can write very much better plays than the Irish Literary Theater has staged. But, of course, the directors would not like to present such improper writers to the uncultivated, much less to the cultivated, rab-

blement. Accordingly, the rabblement, placid and intensely moral, is enthroned in boxes and galleries amid a hum of approval—in bestia Trionfante—and those who think that Echegaray is "morbid," and titter coyly when Melisande lets down her hair, are not sure but they are the trustees of every intellectual and poetic pleasure.

Meanwhile, what of the artists? It is equally unsafe to say of Mr. Yeats at present that he has or has not genius. In aim and form "The Wind Among the Reeds" is poetry of the highest order, and "The Adoration

of the Magi" (a story which one of the great Russians might have written) shows what Mr. Yeats can do when he breaks with the half gods. But an aesthete has a floating will and Mr. Yeats's treacherous instinct of adaptability must be blamed for his recent association with a platform from which every self-respect should have urged him to refrain. Mr. Martyn and Mr. Moore are not writers of much originality. Mr. Martyn, disabled as he is by an incorrigible style, had none of the fierce, hysterical power of Strindberg, whom he suggests at times, and with him one is conscious of a lack of breadth and distinction which outweighs the nobility of certain passages. Mr. Moore, however, has wonderful mimetic ability, and some years ago his books might have entitled him to the place of honor among English novelists. But though "Vain Fortune" (perhaps one should add some of "Esther Waters") is fine, original work, Mr. Moore is really struggling in the backwash of that tide which has advanced from Flaubert through Jakobson to d'Annunzio: for two entire eras lie between "Madame Bovary" and "Il Fuoco." It is plain from "Celibates" and the later novels that Mr. Moore is beginning to draw upon his literary account and the quest of a new impulse may explain his recent startling conversion. Converts are in the movement now and Mr. Moore and his island have been fitly admired. But however frankly Mr. Moore may misquote Pater and Turgeneff to defend himself, his new impulse has no kind of relation to the future of art.

In such circumstances it has become imperative to define the position. If an artist courts the favor of the multitude he cannot escape the contagion of its fetichism and deliberate self-deception, and if he joins in a popular movement he does so at his own risk. Therefore, the Irish Literary Theater, by its surrender to the trolls, has cut itself adrift from the line of advancement. Until he has freed himself from the mean influence about him—sodden enthusiasm and clever insinuation and every flattering influence of vanity and low ambition—no man is an artist at all. But his true servitude is that he inherits a will broken by doubt and a soul that yields up all its hate to a caress; and the most seeming independent are those who are the first to reassume their bonds. But Truth deals largely with us. Elsewhere there are men who are worthy to carry on the tradition of the old master who is dying in Christiania. He has already found his successor in the writer of "Michael Kramer," and the third minister will not be wanting when his hour comes. Even now that hour may be standing by the door.

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JOSEPH CONRAD was sixty-five years old on December 6