

- BOOK REVIEW -

THE HOODED HAWK

D. B. Wyndham Lewis

New York,

Longmans, Green & Co., 1947, (312 p.)

Dominic Bevan W. Lewis, author of **Francois Villon, King Spider, On Straw and Other Conceits**, and **The Hooded Hawk**, the biography of a biographer, was born in the country of Wales in 1894. World War One took him away (not unwillingly) from his law studies. Shell-shocked twice, malaria-stricken eight times, second lieutenant Lewis returned to London in 1919 with the ambitions of a journalist. He immediately joined the staff of the London Daily Express as a columnist conducting the "By the Way" column under the pseudonym of "Beachcomber." He left after four years, and has since written a weekly article for the Daily Mail. He now resides in St. Germain, and "knows Paris with the thoroughness possible only after years of residence there."

The purpose Mr. Lewis has in writing **The Hooded Hawk**, or **The Case of Mr. Boswell**, is to defend the name of James Boswell, the immortal author of **The Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson** against more than a century of calumny. He also hopes that this volume, "a sign-post" to Boswell's **Life** of Johnson, may "add one or two to that large company whose copy of the **Life** stands ever at the bed head, dog-eared, and shabby with handling." In this noble and agreeable task, Mr. Lewis succeeds.

Critics for the past one hundred years have been very harsh in their condemnation of James Boswell. He has been referred to by such names as: drunkard, womanizer, tosspot, lunatic, scribbler and many others as condemning. Mr. Lewis does not deny the charges, but says that "his social temperament (Boswell's) and the most sottish age in English Literature were against him." Boswell was no worse than a great many of his contemporaries, among whom we may cite: Steele, Addison, Lamb, Voltaire, Rousseau and Lonsdale. MacAulay is referred to as "the Himmler of the Whigs." Of England in the eighteenth century, it could truly be said: "the peerage was rich in lunatics." Boswell was not what Mr. Don Marquis "would hail as an Old Soak", but he was "a plastic creature, strongly affected by environment and circumstance."

Boswell met Dr. Johnson in 1763. This is the "major event in Boswell's existence." The friendship between these two men is one of the strangest in English history. Why should this "sociable, highly temperamental lion", Dr. Johnson, choose James Boswell, a man who "managed to keep faith alight under a bushel of follies", to be the chief recorder of his life? The reason seems to lie in the fact that Boswell had an unique charm about him that immediately attracted all types of people. Moreover, he was well educated and, perhaps more important than anything else, he held in his heart a great and undying love for the eminent Doctor. Two opposite characters, Dr. Johnson and Wilkes, found pleasure in his company, and he in turn thoroughly enjoyed keeping company with them.

Mr. Lewis gives an excellent description of such famous place^s as: London, Tunis, Edinburgh and Paris, as they existed in the middle part of the eighteenth century. Through the words of Lewis, we see and listen to conversations that Boswell had with Rousseau, Voltaire, Goldsmith, Paoli (the great Corsican general), Fanny Burney, Hannah More, Walpole, and many other such famous men and women. The Hellfire Club with Wilkes as one of its members is mentioned. We see executions with Boswell looking on in apparent enjoyment, although he did go out of his way on more than one occasion to save condemned prisoners. We read of the injustice prevalent in the public schools of England at the time; and we can watch a play like "The Beggar's Opera" at Drury Lane through the eyes of Boswell.

The only stabilizing influences on the wild life of Boswell are to be found in such people as the Doctor, Paoli, Temple and Mrs. Boswell. To such as Wilkes, Lonsdale and Churchill, on the other hand, may be traced influences that helped to drag him down into those spells of melancholy to which he was so frequently subjected. Speaking of Rousseau's meeting with Boswell, Mr. Lewis says: "Perhaps he recognized and warmed to a brother-madman." Whatever may be said against Boswell, it has to be admitted that he was no fool when it came to the art of writing. His **Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson** is one of the best written and most popular pieces of literature in the English language. Boswell has a style that admits of few imperfections; his exactness and care in setting down details are hard to match.

The Hooded Hawk has achieved its purpose. It is a masterpiece and should be treated as a companion to the **Life**. The word "Hawk" in the title signifies Boswell's family crest; "Hooded" may be taken as synonymous with the many attempts of Boswell to soar above himself. Every Johnsonian will want to read this book. It has received the highest praise from literary critics, and to do the book justice, all I can add is **Read it**.

—ALLAN F. NOONAN '48

THE DRY WOOD**Caryll Houselander****New York****Sheed & Ward,****1947,****(257 p.)**

The Dry Wood, written by Caryll Houselander, is a simple and moving story showing the influence that a Catholic priest had on his parishioners during his life, and the influence that the simple faith of his people had on those of their own faith and on others.

Father Malone was not an outstanding man during his life. In fact, he was known to scarcely anyone outside his little parish of Riverside, in London. But within the parish he was looked upon as the model of holiness and charity. So great was the people's belief in his sanctity that after his death they clamoured for his immediate canonization, sought a miracle through his intercession; they even asked for a specific cure, a sort of test case, the recovery of the little deformed child, Willie Jewel.

This book shows us a cross-section of London life at this time. Rose O'Shane was one of those whose fortunes had once been greater and who looked at the world through eyes sometimes a little blurred from a recent visit to the Mimosa Street saloon. But Rose was beautiful in the charity which "glowed in her like a heap of red embers, and which a mere sigh from any poor creature at all could fan to a bright flame." Rose gave compassion to the whole world for she knew and loved God, and saw in every human the image of Christ.

Timothy Green was a newspaper man who had gone to Riverside for the paper on which he was working. Timothy nearly lost his job for he came back, not with the story of the degradation of glamour in Riverside for which he had been sent, but with a story of human nature lifted to exaltation. He was not of the faith, but he was led by the confidence of the people of Riverside in Father Malone's protection, to the light of the Catholic Church.

There was Solly Lee, a Jew, who had sold holy cards bearing a slight resemblance to Father Malone, dressed in the shining robes of a saint and with a halo around his head. But Solly had always been sceptical of religion and lived with Carmel Fernandez, who had been banished from her home because of her conduct. Again, it was the memory of the saintly priest's pure goodness and holiness which brought them both back to God, and gave Solly the grace to be received into the Catholic Church.

These are a few of the many characters portrayed in this book. The characters are alive and very vividly drawn. Perhaps the explanation lies in the ability of the author to probe the depths of the human soul. The story is told very simply. This is the first novel written by Caryll Houselander. In the three books already

published she has written "of the wholeness of reality, of the visible world dominated by the invisible." Miss Houselander is a very unusual thinker and writer. Her book is an example of good Catholic fiction. Read it.

—ALICE McCLOSKEY '49

THE SEALED VERDICT

Lionel Shapiro

New York, Doubleday & Company, 1947, (278 p.)

Canadian born Lionel Shapiro, whom we all know as a remarkable war correspondent, as a radio commentator and as a feature writer for many newspapers, has proven himself a very capable novelist in *The Sealed Verdict*.

In an unaffected, straight-forward, and realistic way Shapiro brings one to realize the physical and mental degradation of war; the fact that lasting peace can never be built on a foundation of hatred, greed, cruelty, and injustice; and most particularly that it is the duty of the Allies as conquerors to know the fundamental principles of their way of life, and to practise them at all times in their relations with the vanquished. He warns us of the danger that our hatred and desire for retribution may blind us to our responsibility to ourselves, to our dead heroes, and to the world.

The story, in short, concerns Major Lashley of the American army, who had, to the satisfaction of the public, the army and the court, proven that Otto Steigmann, a leading Nazi, was guilty of the crimes with which he was charged. There is now, however, a great struggle going on in the mind of Lashley: whether he should allow the guilty Steigmann to be hanged on the testimony of Rodal, a Czech, his star witness, whom medical authorities later discovered is suffering from paranoia, or whether he should sacrifice his reputation and honour by demanding a new trial for Steigmann.

Another fact which causes Lashley much anxiety and adds much interest to the story is his difficulty in detaining, in Reschweiler, Themis Delisle, a frenchwoman, Steigmann's only witness, till he could determine her purpose or motive in being at the trial, and her strange connections with Steigmann.

The main purpose of the book is to impress upon the conquerors their duty of adhering to the ideals of love, understanding, and strictness which Major Lashley stands for in the novel.

Although the book is admirable in many respects, one cannot but object to the hero, Major Lashley, in his looseness of morals in his associations with the Frenchwoman. Shapiro seems to have a clear and accurate concept of the ideals of charity, sympathetic understanding, and justice, but he labours under the false assumption that promiscuity is all right as long as there is no injury to the persons concerned, to their families, or to society.

The book is worthy of commendation. It contains much that is enlightening and instructive, particularly for adults.

—CLIFFORD MURPHY '50