

navigating characteristics of certain birds, and what mysteries occur at Mach 1? Of particular interest to readers on the Atlantic seaboard, still suffering from the wantonness of Hazel and her precedent sisters, will be the detailed chapters on weather, clouds, tornadoes, and hurricanes, their genesis and development.

GENEROUS use of anecdote dramatizes the forces which Mr. Murchie is describing: the appalling potential and mischievous conduct of lightning and the unpredictability of the tornado. Perhaps the most exotic of these yarns is the account of Sergeant-gunner Alkamade of the RAF, who had to step out of his burning Lancaster bomber sans parachute at 18,000 feet over Germany. He woke up the next morning in a snow field and walked into the next village to surrender to the understandably dubious constabulary.

"Song of the Sky" tells of the essence of flight, from the sententious liturgy of the intercom to the hopeless sensation of watching rime ice build up its lethal distortion on the leading edge of the wing—over deicing boots which refuse to function. And that most important of realizations comes through: flight is compromise, a calm, judicial compromise between opposing forces.

There are speculations which will exercise the imagination of some and repel others. Is it possible, Mr. Murchie wants us to consider, that the Coriolis force has subconsciously induced a counter-clockwise civilization, thus a right-handed society in the Northern Hemisphere? Under the stress of such questionings, it must be admitted, regretfully, that Mr. Murchie often strains more than credibility. One can cavil and wish that he had applied more discipline to his metaphors: as example, to describe the birth of snow, in more than one (Continued on page 57)

IDEAS IN OUR TIME

Byways of Conservatism

"Road to the Right," by Gordon Harrison (William Morrow. 342 pp. \$4.50), is an analysis of the tradition and the potentialities of conservatism in America. Here it is reviewed by John A. Garraty, associate professor of history at Michigan State College and author of a life of Henry Cabot Lodge.

By John A. Garraty

SIX YEARS ago, in "The American Political Tradition," Richard Hofstadter examined the political philosophies of a galaxy of Presidents and politicians from the Founding Fathers to Franklin Roosevelt. Writing in the age of Truman's "do-nothing" Eightieth Congress, when party lines seemed meaningless and leadership had been replaced by wrangling, he was impressed by the essential similarity of all American politicians, their universal acceptance of "the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man." Burrowing beneath partisan exaggerations to the "shared convictions" of his subjects, he gave expression to the frustrations of liberals in the postwar world, who felt the need for a new ideology but could find neither the philosopher to formulate it nor the statesman to set it in motion.

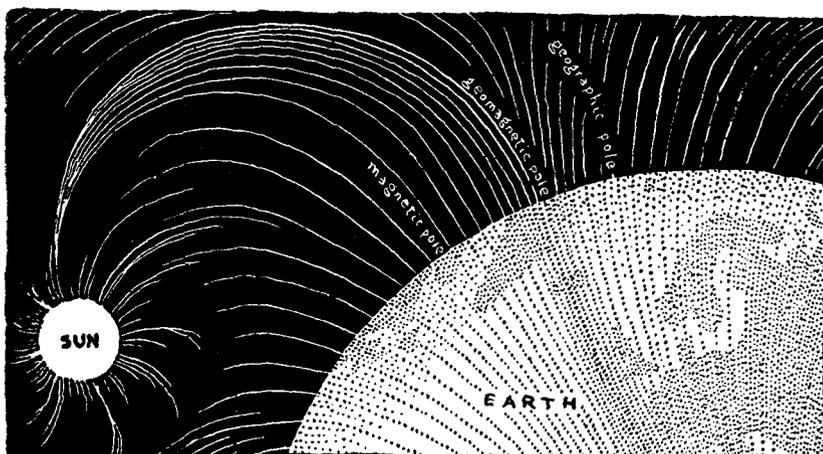
In the years since 1948 the nation has tried Truman's Fair Deal and marched on Eisenhower's Great Crusade without significantly altering its underlying political assumptions. In fact, it seems to have abandoned the search for newness and made a virtue

of accepting the traditional way as the only way. Books like Russell Kirk's "The Conservative Mind" have pointed up the values of the conservative philosophy, and historians like Allan Nevins and Edward N. Saveth have reexamined the effects of unrestrained nineteenth-century capitalism on national development, emphasizing the benefits it bestowed rather than the harm it produced. Now, in "Road to the Right," Gordon Harrison attempts an analysis of conservative politics in American history, which, he says, is chiefly "the political performance of American business."

This, of course, involves a denial of the homogeneity that Hofstadter found in American politics, because it is based on the premise that conservative politics was not the same as liberal. On its face this seems reasonable enough, for Hofstadter carried his argument too far. But Harrison actually adds much strength to Hofstadter's thesis, because his dichotomizations lead him into many inconsistencies.

Political conservatism, he argues, is more an attitude of mind than a practical program. It seeks to protect property, resist change, prevent the domination of government by transient, thoughtless majorities. It is anchored to certain enduring ideals (just those which Hofstadter claimed to be universal) and is absorbed in administering the government efficiently, rather than in changing its structure and function.

BUT when Harrison attempts to prove these generalizations he runs into trouble. Conservatives resist change. Theodore Roosevelt's reforms, therefore, were aimed only at preserving the system against really basic change, for T. R. was a conservative. Yet Harrison calls Franklin Roosevelt a liberal. Were his reforms designed to destroy the capitalistic system? Few historians would say so. Again; conservatives, bent on thwarting the hasty judgments of fickle majorities, place emphasis on checks and balances in government, such as the courts and the executive veto. Therefore the Republican Party after the Civil War was not a conservative party, because it attempted to establish the supremacy of the legislature. But what political group in our history was more concerned with the rights of property? And have not



—Illustrations from "Song of the Sky," by the author

... magnetic lines of Earth—"a new dimension in the ocean of the sky."

"liberals" from Jefferson to Franklin Roosevelt been concerned with the problem of the irresponsible mob?

What seems the most serious weakness in Mr. Harrison's book is this: he attempts to give the dignity of a reasoned philosophy to a political conservatism that he repeatedly admits has been dominated by selfish opportunism. Nowhere is the nonsense of this more clear than in his treatment of the Whigs. After repeatedly pointing out that the party was unified only by hatred of Jackson and the desire for office, after admitting that "in Pennsylvania the paths to Whiggery were unusually devious," that Southern Whigs "tended to weave in and out" of the party on the basis of local issues and "their calculus of present political advantage," and that "Western Whigs formed the least coherent wing of the party," he can still conclude:

For all their divisions and differences they had and fully recognized a unity of spirit which they called conservatism. Although in the scramble for office they tempered and often betrayed that spirit, they never wholly lost it.

How much easier to explain Whiggery in terms of the Log Cabin and Hard Cider cynicism of 1840! How much simpler to write off the conservative's concern for limited government as the perennial resistance of the "outs" to the exercise of power by the "ins"!

Finally, Mr. Harrison exhibits a remarkable complacency about the soundness of the modern conservative position. The present, he writes, "finds conservatism constitutionally secure, politically able, economically homogeneous, and fully instructed in the facts of democratic life in this century." If only McCarthy, Jenner, Dirksen and all the other modern-day "liberals" would see the light the millennium would indeed be here.



—Harris & Ewing.

Alan Valentine—"... does not wail, scream."

Evils of Egalitarianism

"The Age of Conformity," by Alan Valentine (Henry Regnery, 179 pp. \$3), is an examination of the forces that are said to be making this the era of the common man. William Barrett, who reviews it here, is associate editor of the Partisan Review.

By William Barrett

CONFORMITY may very well become the central social problem of this age, and for those Americans who feel a little smugly on this issue—the wind certainly seems to have been blowing that way in certain quarters—no more sobering antidote can be offered than Alan Valentine's brief but very tightly-packed book, "The Age of Conformity."

"Sober" seems somehow the right word for Mr. Valentine, who is here attempting the difficult part of the prophet-critic but without that tone of hysterical reproach that has lent some gaudy rhetorical fireworks to some of our more bitter Jeremiahs but also usually compromises the accuser along with the accused. Mr. Valentine does not wail, scream, beat his breast, or otherwise tear the prophetic role to tatters: he simply puts together in quiet fashion all the signs he sees of a dangerous drift in American life away from standards of excellence in politics, morals, and culture, and the portrait is all the more disturbing for its sobriety. Having occupied important posts in government, business, and education—he was for fifteen years president of the University of Rochester—he has had an unusual opportunity of seeing American life from a number of different angles, and from this book it is clear that he sees the object steadily and sees it whole.

True, he deals here only with the darker and shadier areas of our national life, but even the most purblind of our patriots cannot shirk these problems forever if American democracy is to move toward a brighter future.

The drift toward conformity is not a mere moral lapse on the part of Americans today; rather, it flows out of three powerful forces driving toward mass society all over the world: (1) the economic trend toward highly industrialized and urbanized society; (2) the political trend toward direct and centralized government; (3) the

social trend toward the acceptance only of popular standards of culture. Under the steam-rolling pressure of these forces, according to Mr. Valentine, the quality of American life—on all levels, personal, political, cultural—has been flattened out, and in the last decade deteriorated markedly.

The idea of democracy is sometimes thought erroneously to be the glorification of the Common Man. But Thomas Jefferson, the American father of the democratic idea, extolled the *capacities* of the common man, not his achievements, underlining thereby the necessity of education, discipline, and leadership if these capacities are to be realized. Only with the Jacksonian revolution in the 1830s. Mr. Valentine claims, does the common man become praised at the expense of the uncommon man, the vulgar at the expense of the refined, the know-nothing at the expense of the egghead. (Mr. Valentine, by the way, does not speak for either party, and Democrats as well as Republicans suffer the whiplash of his criticism.)

OBVIOUSLY, there is nothing new in these details of Mr. Valentine's indictment of American life. There could hardly be on a subject that has been so thoroughly scoured and picked apart by this time by journalists, sociologists, pundits, and assorted visiting firemen from foreign shores. Mr. Valentine's contribution—and it is a valuable one—is to have put all these nagging details into a rounder and larger perspective, and he is able to do this chiefly because his approach to the problem is constructive: he is not complaining in order to hear his own voice rise a shrill octave or two, but in order to ask honestly what can be done.

Where is the remedy? How can we halt this mass drift toward conformity? Since we are committed to democracy, Mr. Valentine holds, the solution we are to look for has to be a democratic one: the people themselves must decide what their democracy is to mean and what their freedom is to be used for. Once and for all, it must be realized that equal opportunity does not mean equal capacity, and that elite groups, democratically recruited from the whole body of society, must be given their proper place and prestige in American life. Otherwise our democracy is bound to sink further and deeper into the swamp of human mediocrity.