

PORNOGRAPHY

Now to give battle one must find a disputed point, and struggle for its mastery. English pudibundery being the main strong hold of the Puritan, I now concentrate my guns on that position.

With the exception of the Chinese classics and one or two of the Hindu and Buddhist, all authors of antiquity are wholly or partially concerned to discourse frankly, joyously, amusingly, of the sexual act. Of modern authors we observe that only the pornographic survive. Shakespeare, Sterne, Swift, Rabelais, Villon,—what names have we to put against these? Milton and some lesser.

And to-day? What authors of the last century do we find on our shelves? Byron, exiled, yet with wealth sufficient to mock his foes; Shelley, expelled from Oxford, exiled, robbed of his children; Keats, bullied into consumption; Blake, nigh starved; Flaubert, Baudelaire, Gautier, Zola, Richepin all prosecuted, suppressed; Verlaine, his life a mere holiday between spells of prison. I cannot quote you the good authors, the popular authors; neither I nor any one else can remember their names.

All this babble about indecency is the merest froth; as Vizetelly dies, broken by imprisonment for the crime of having translated Zola, that same Zola is being feasted at the Guildhall by the Lord Mayor of London.

But, then, of course, the question arises “what is pornography?”

It has been justly remarked that the greatest men are those who play upon the whole scale of human emotions, from the spiritual to the ob-

scene. The humour of Aristophanes, Shakespere, Sterne, and Rabelais is identical with that of the ordinary smoking-room story; only a deal better done. Nor is there any other eternal humour; other kinds depend on the accidents of the age.

You never find a single impure line in any of these authors, any gloating on impurity. The laughter is hearty, there is no schoolboy sniggering—no consciousness of guilt.

(So even with Keats' Gadfly and Sharing Eve's Apple; Browning's bawdy jests in Pippa Passes, the Ring and the Book, One Word More, La Saisiaz and elsewhere; cleaner, truly, than the furtive eroticism in Prometheus Unbound. Shelley was more consciously under the curse of Jesus.) It is this "consciousness of sin" which is to my mind the essentially Christian attitude. It is this which inspires the outcry against art and simple pleasures; these swine nose everywhere for filth, and grunt with shocked glee when they find it.

All serious subject are tabooed as "bad form!" (I must add in parenthesis that the eugenic prigs and sex-problem pigs are every whit as bad. They are just as shocked at Rabelais as the other Puritans).

There is nothing impure in passion, if only it be elemental and strong. The whole soul storms the height of heaven, exults, laughs, enjoys, falls exhausted. The thing is clean.

It is the lady novelist that drags her snail-track across the desert of bad literature. Nothing so excites my loathing as to see these ghouls licking their chops over the adventures of some dirty slut of a Princess. They scent indecency in passion beyond the marriage-tie: they will not even allow a man to be in love with his own wife. Why shouldn't he be? He is now and then. I happen to know it. The long and short of the whole matter is this, that there is nothing clean but ecstasy.

Whether that ecstasy is the divine spirituality of Visvarupadarshana, or the sexual splendour of Epipsychidion, or the laughter of Catullus, all is pure and perfect.

It is the vision of the God that is pure ; it is the veils that stain. Whether the curtain of falsehood be moral, or ethical, or romantic, it is a stain. Weakness is evil and impure ; strength is divine and clean.

A mountain is more naked than a marsh. By your leave, gentiles, I will continue to live on the mountain.