

THE POEM ITSELF

I should really leave this to my friend Captain Fuller to dissect at his leisure, that he might bye-and-bye edify the public in a little monograph of say 350,000 words. But it seems to me important to explain the form to a reader before he begins. For the work so transcends my own critical faculties that I am sure others will find difficulty in getting my point of view without very serious attention.

In the first place, my predecessor Shelley was so naturally gentle that his Prometheus can be read to-day by our young ladies without their ever suspecting that he was getting at God.

Nietzsche on the other hand is very obscure, very superficial, very philosophical, and he did not write English.

I have been trained in a harder school than Shelley; and so my little finger is thicker than my father's loins. He went and "trode the glaciers of the Alps"—the Mer de Glace; I broke the record by my 68 days on the Baltoro glacier. He went out in a boat, and got drowned at that; I have travelled on the Bralduh in a Zak. He shrank from the sight of a butcher's shop; I followed wounded buffalo into the jungle on foot. He thought Indians were "mild"; I shot two Bengalis. He never had such a galaxy of imbecility before him as R. J. Campbell, Winnington-Ingram, Tolstoi, Bernard Vaughan, Torrey, Dowie, Bernard Shaw, Booth, Father Ignatius, and my Uncle Tom.

He had not read the Encyclical against Modernism; the religious essays of the Right Hon. W. E.

Gladstone, and the preposterous Balfour. He was unfamiliar with the spermatorrhoea of Tennyson's thought, and the diarrhoea of its simulacrum in G. K. Chesterton.

This explains why Shelley's wholesome indignation appears in me as little less than a blind lust of Destruction. (That is to say, on the rare occasion when I so far fall from adeptship as to credit the evidence of my senses).

I have consequently done all I can to shock and hurt the enemy. I have painted their God as the obscene thing he is from my knowledge of my Uncle Tom; I have made his Trinity ridiculous and his scheme disgusting; I have painted Magdalen as the Syrian strumpet she was from the best models among English society whores (thank you, Ada; thank you, Kathleen!); I have painted Mary as a lascivious flapper from my knowledge of English virgins—thank you, Vera! thank you, Lydia! thank you, Millicent!—the hag is my mother-in-law, and the baboon the Reverend F. F. Kelly. I cannot pretend to remember exactly who 'sat' for the ox and the ass, though the names of Charles Watts and Joseph Mc. Cabe somehow instinctively suggest themselves in this connection. The satyr and nymph crowd are mostly painted from imagination, for on my honour I hardly know so many decent people; I painted Jesus first as a joke—the brass bottle of our braying clergy; I developed him as a low class Jew [not knowing any South African millionnaires I took him straight out of the Gospel] and lastly I miraculously turned him into a real man, chiefly out of compliment to the distinguished fictionist Ernest Renan. In other words, I have kept as close to my documents as any one has any reason to expect.

With regard to the plot, I must ask my readers to believe in the existence of a great magical broth-

erhood formal or informal pledged to the guardianship of mankind.

With this postulate the way is clear.

In the prologue we find innocence: Pagan love, Pagan music, Pagan mysticism, and we find the Sabbatarians pretty sick about it, like the fox that lost his tail.

We next find Alexander, one of the guardians, anxious about humanity. He is not squeamish about a little blood, his own or another's, and he discovers the plot.

Next we find the dove achieving his foul purpose, not on a pure laughing Pagan girl, but on a furtive lecherous girl, already half a Christian. Enough of this painful subject!

Now comes the Nativity, with the guardians, under Alexander's presidency, on the watch. They are perfectly indifferent to all but the secret purpose—more magical ethics, my disciples! They are moved neither to pity nor to disgust, for the Great Pity and the Great Disgust have moved them to this Immobility.

Next we see love under Christianity, as guilt, disease, weariness; and the half-man rotten by its revolting filth, consenting to the ruin of mankind and his own death as relief from it.

Lastly we see the man magically awakened to a sense of his disaster, too weak to retrieve the past or avert the future, though alive to all its horror. In the meanwhile the corruption of Roman virtue begins; and we should end the play in despair were it not that Alexander comes forward and obligingly prophesies the arrival of Aleister Crowley—the Saviour of the Earth. So that the reader need only turn back to the title-page to see that the Light hath indeed arisen in the darkness.