

THE ART OF LORD DUNSANY.

"THE SWORD OF WELLERAN." (Heinemann: 6s.)

SO debasing is adolescence in these days of industrialism, that whenever the true and the beautiful is presented to our notice, we have only two alternatives. The first and most generally useful is to be shocked; the second is to scoff, observing "Fairy tales!"

Thus to enter the Kingdom of Heaven of Art one must become as a little child.

If, on the contrary, we find the vile and ugly presented to us in such a way as to pander to our own secret vices, we smack our lips and exclaim: "A dreadful subject, but how necessary! And what a service to Religion!"

And if sheer silliness is dressed up with a little tinsel sentimentality, we acclaim it as exquisite art.

Lord Dunsany, under these conditions, is irretrievably damned.

The prurience of our nominal guides is a thing so inconceivably far-reaching that one hesitates to affirm that they can find nothing "indecent" in his work; but if their nose for dirt serves them even here, one must merely envy the scope of their imagination.

Their safer course—for one cannot follow their flights of fancy so far—is to take the "pretty, but I don't know what it means" attitude.

"All in the air, my dear sir! A clever young fellow, my dear sir! Wasted talent, my dear sir! The lad would be truly useful to Society if only he would cease to occupy himself with dreams, and apply himself steadily to sanitary engineering."

So much for the dull old dodderers, who have saddened their brains with Marie Corelli, *Daily Mirror*, *Christian Herald* dram-drinking.

For this is the point: it is impossible to read Lord Dunsany without thinking. So the general reader throws him aside, insulted. How dare he ask me to think? Dams the fellow! I think quite enough already. If there were justice in the world I'd have had more than one Limerick prize last year! Why, I'm a poet; and this stuff is only prose.

So it happens that Lord Dunsany dedicates "The Sword of Welleran" to the few who cared for his previous books.

Yet all his work is good, very good. English is a well-balanced rapier in his hands; and the fact that he prefers to cut silk handkerchiefs to slaying dragons would, one might have thought, commended him to a wide circle.

[A Lord, too! Is the Suburban market dead? What are his publishers about? With a coronet, and imitation parchment, and pink ribbons, there ought to have been something doing! However, these elementary precautions were omitted.]

But no! and the reason is that all his dreams are true. An unsuspected profound of philosophy lies beneath his smooth, subtle, imaginative sentences, like a vast subterranean sea deathly still beneath bright gardens and sunny towers.

I cannot pretend to have assimilated or unified this philosophy, to have known the God that is shadowed forth in all his gracious images; to have apprehended the ultimate purport of his message; to have learnt the wisdom of Uldoon, and evaded Zyrice Moe; to have followed the runes of the feet of Patterney Leaves, and thereby found wisdom to overcome the awful magic of Mana-Good-Sushai, though at least I have been with Shaun upon his voyages; nor do I know upon what road I may meet Mung, or even whether Mung hath power upon THE END. But I desire all these things very vehemently; and even were it but to wander among the images that Lord Dunsany has thrown off from his soul, the pilgrimage were pleasant.

But the dread Fever of the West, Hurry, is upon men; they sweat with restless tossing upon their bed of "business"; they shiver with the arid fire that consumes them; in their delirium they dream that coin is gold.

As for me, I am at least awake. I shall go forth, and wander with my gipsy love in the great park of the Alhambra, and play cards with her for kisses on that flowered terrace that overhangs the crouching city, or, on the balcony of that frescoed tower that overlooks the great ravine, respire the breath of the Sierra.

Or I shall brood alone among the marshes and the moors, seeking and finding God in every sprig of heather, hearing His voice in every bird-cry, feeling His kiss in every gust that blows from over the loch.

Or maybe I shall wander, as of old, by the sea amid the palms, diving anon into the surf, and riding shoreward on its crest—a very amphibian. Then, basking on the warm

sand, watching the laughing girls go by with flowers in their hair. . . .

Damn!

"The greatest difficulty with which we have to contend at the present time is the irregularity of the demand for labour, and we are certain that with the establishment of British industries on a firmer basis—buz—buz—buz.

"The Dean of Wells is now in his seventy-seventh year, while the Dean of Durham, the Rev. E. W. Kitchin, is eighty-two. Dean Gregory, of St. Paul's, is ninety." Dear God! think of that!

Lord Dunsany's English is nearly, if not quite, as good as this; it is his choice of subject that ruins his chances. . . .

There you are again! There's the Alhambra glistening in the sun, and the winter snow cresting the ridge, and little Presentation crooning some soft love-song in her balcony and (please God!) thinking sometimes of— Well, well! all this is very dull. Dean Gregory is ninety and Dean Kitchin is eighty-two, and Canon Hensley Henson is in favour of an age-limit for the clergy.

I am myself in favour of a close time for drivell and platitude, and even for prudery and solacity, the "great twin brethren" that fight so well for England and the Nonconformist conscience.

ALFRED CROWLEY.

LOVE AND THE POOR SUITOR. By Percy White. (Greening.)

We always pick out a book of Percy White's with eager anticipation. Since we read "The West End" and "Park Lane" we have regarded him as a sort of latter-day Thackeray with semi-cynical views of life, an excellent style and a very uncommon power of story telling. But "Love and the Poor Sutor" has none of Mr. Percy White's distinctive qualities; it might have been written by almost anyone. It is a slight love story—pretty, but nothing more. It is a book of Percy White's with nothing of Percy White in it.

BRENDVALE. By Ernest Black. (Greening.)

This is absolutely the worst book it has been our fortune to read for many a month. The author knows South Africa, and Brendvale is a little town in Cape Colony. But he is not able to give us any real idea of the life, and his characters are all stuffed with sawdust: even the hero, who is probably the author himself, is unreal, stupidly unreal. Bit by bit we came to the conclusion that the book is so bad simply because Mr. Black does not know how to write. The picture it gives is like a photograph taken by an amateur; there are persons in the picture; but it is taken so badly that the pretty girls look deformed; the beauty is grinning, the hero is half hidden by his own camera. The whole thing is futile-feeble, worthless.

SPANISH GOLD, by George A. Birmingham. (Methuen.)

"Spanish Gold," by George A. Birmingham, is an extravagance without interest and almost without meaning; but there is a certain humour in the painting of the Irish clergyman, who is a liar through love of invention, a liar of fancy if not of imagination, whose many inventions lead him like runs of a ladder, to unexpected success; but a thin sketch of one person, or rather, of one characteristic of a man, is scarcely enough to make into a book.

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