

Frank Harris

An Attempt at Appreciation

By Aleister Crowley

For seven years past Frank Harris, the most conspicuous figure in English letters, has lived and toiled among us; he has given of his very life-blood to the American public, yet he is practically unknown here, save to a comparatively small group of admirers. Men of genius everywhere approach him hat in hand—Bernard Shaw writes more than a hundred pages about him—it is only in this country that he is ignored and our critics have never even attempted to give us a true picture of the man.

This fine sketch by Crowley, the poet, comes at an opportune moment; it brings us nearer the real Frank Harris than anything that has yet been published about him in this country, and I am glad indeed to have the privilege of passing it on to the readers of Pearson's.

THE EDITOR.



WAS going through old files the other day, and came across the letters Frank Harris wrote me when first I knew him. Strangely enough, I do not in the least remember how I met him; and, before I met him, I had not read any of his works, it having been a rule of mine from the time when I went up to Cambridge until I felt myself "un homme fait" never to read any book by a living author lest it should influence my style.

I was a youngster even more callow than by right of years, for I had been brought up in the sheltered life, and inquisition-tortured thereby, was cursed with almost pathological shyness, and had spent most of my adult years in climbing mountains in remote parts of the globe, like Mexico and India. I think I fail to remember my first meeting with Harris because he frightened me too much. I have not compared notes with Moses as to the voice he heard on Sinai, but if it was in the same class as the voice of Frank Harris, I wonder Moses did not break the tables long before he got back to camp. I have heard many of the great orators of the world, but I have never heard a voice capable of such power and passion combined with perfect control and delicacy of expression.

I remember once in the Hotel Meurice—in the Great Hall—they actually stopped the band to let Frank Harris tell a story.

I remember the dinner at the Ritz in London given to Bobby Ross for having stuck to Oscar Wilde, with hardly any one in England but Frank Harris to back him. Ross had pulled Wilde's affairs out of bankruptcy, and made a fortune for his children. It was a distinguished party that had gathered to do Ross honor, a party of those disciples of the Master who had got wind of what the Pharisees were doing: "They all forsook him and fled." The danger was over; they were gathered together in the name of the Lord. But they were all

secretly determined to hush up the matter which was a by-word from Yokohama to San Francisco. One by one the speakers got up and said the polite things. "Mr. Chairman, Your Grace, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen," they began; and went on to piffle aimlessly about any harmless subject, no matter what, so long as it could not possibly be taken to refer to the very solemn and serious secret which everyone understood, with all the clarity of terror, to lurk in the occasion.

Last of the speakers came Frank Harris. He followed the routine of the others, "Mr. Chairman, Your Grace," and all the rest of it, but in a voice of such wrath and contempt that every syllable was an insult. He stopped and looked around the hall. There was one person whom everybody knew to be not there. It was the bosom friend of Oscar Wilde, the cherished ideal who had betrayed him to a two-years' crucifixion and a lingering death in life. The glance of Harris asked, so that every one present could understand it, "Where is Lord Alfred Douglas?" (An equally indiscreet jurymen had put this identical question with his eyes on the dock where Wilde was standing.) Then he began to speak. His voice, that night, was Jove's, but not the Jove of thunder—it was the Jove of rain. It sobbed and trembled. I thought of tears, tears both divine and human, pure tears that spoke of Weltschmerz more than of simply personal grief, falling upon the rotten leaves that careless winds had strewed upon that grave in Paris. The murderers had not yet marked it with a monument.

In sad and thrilling tones, slowly, with tremulous touch, the speaker subtly moved his audience to his own human pity. They forgot that he was speaking to the point, the point they were all so anxious to avoid. Then suddenly Harris changed the subject with so swift ease that nobody knew exactly why he was startled. I myself lost a sentence. The swerve had thrown me out of my conscious self. I