

MY CRAPULOUS CONTEMPORARIES

NO. VII

A GALAHAD IN GOMORRAH

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IT is very fortunate that even in times when the greatest laxity of morals prevails, in England at least there is always found some austere and noble soul to protest against decadence ; to be a witness in the midst of corruption, that there is a standard of pure and lofty thought, a City of the Soul, fortified against all evil, and whose artillery can overwhelm the savage hordes of impurity.

We do not think any one will accuse us of flattery in saying that Lord Alfred Douglas is just such a person, and this is the more striking phenomenon as it is so rare to find true moral greatness associated with poetical genius. We write thus in order to direct his attention to a little book published some years ago in Paris, but reprinted in an expurgated form in England ; a book of so abominable a character that I am sure it is only necessary to direct his lordship's attention to it to raise a very considerable turmoil. We quote one or two passages :—

“ Their (men's) eyes for beauty are but sightless holes,
Spurned in the dust, Uranian passion lies.
Dull fools decree the sweet unfruitful love,
In Hellas counted more than half divine,
Less than half human now.”

And again :—

“ O, food to my starved eyes,
(That gaze unmoved on wanton charms of girls)
Fair as the lad on Latmian hills asleep.”

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There is a good deal about Perkin Warbeck, a poem called "Jonquil and Fleur de Lys," of a very unhealthy character, and really very little else in the book.

Then there is a poem called "Prince Charming," incredibly sickly and sentimental; but, worse than all, the poem called "Two Loves," beginning with the celebrated quotation from Shakespeare—"My better angel is a man right fair, my worse a women tempting me to ill." In a vision the "poet" sees two people; the first is joyous, and sings; the second walks aside:—

"He is full sad and sweet, and his large eyes
Were strange with wondrous brightness, and staring wide
With gazing; and he sighed with many sighs
That moved me, and his cheeks were wan and white
Like pallid lilies, and his lips were red
Like poppies, and his hands he clenched tight,
And yet again unclenchèd, and his head
Was wreathed with moon-flowers pale as lips of death."

This poem ends with a controversy between these two persons:—

". . . I pray thee speak me sooth:
What is thy name?' He said, 'My name is Love.'
Then straight the first did turn himself to me
And cried, 'He lieth, for his name is Shame;
But I am Love, and I was wont to be
Alone in this fair garden, till he came
Unasked by night; I am true Love, I fill
The hearts of boy and girl with mutual flame.'
Then sighing said the other, 'Have thy will,
I am the Love that dare not speak its name.'"

But the great joke is a tragedy in one act entitled "When the King comes he is welcome." There are two characters in it, Giovanni and Francisco. Francisco cannot sleep, having

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a presentiment that something unpleasant is about to happen. Then there is a knock, and at his private door. It cannot be Giovanni, for "that honey-bee is hived in Florence." It is Giovanni, however, and they slobber for several pages. It turns out that Giovanni had written to Francisco, but the letter had miscarried. It was an important letter. Giovanni had written to say that he was betrothed unto a noble lady. On learning this, Francisco remarked :—

"Blood of Christ—
Betrothed!—What word is that? Curled flame of Hell!
Thou art betrothed? Giovanni! thou, my friend!
O! five red wounds of God, and Mary's mouth!
How hast thou dared it?"

A mock-terrible scene follows, in which Giovanni tries to persuade his friend that it will make no real difference to their relations. Francisco pretends to be convinced, but determines to poison himself and his friend. So Francisco proposes to drink the health of Death as a kind of joke, saying :—

Giovanni: "I will drink to our love and Death and thee."

Francisco: "Nay, nay, I favour not that toast,
Sweetheart,
What have we two to do with Death?"

Francisco: "Sweet feather!
How soon hast thou forgot thy troth of faith.
Consider, chuck, the toast has but this weight,
That thou and I are friends, and that King Death
Is friend of both, and will not harvest us
Before the time of our ripe harvest comes."

We have surely said enough to establish clearly the abominable character of this book. We are sure that the moment

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it is brought to the notice of Lord Alfred Douglas he will take the proper steps to crush the perpetrator.

The title-page discloses, as might be expected, both the title of the book and the name of the author.

The former is "Poèmes," and the latter is Lord Alfred Douglas.

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THE EQUINOX

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