

HERBERT READ ON DR. IQBAL

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While doing some research on Dr. Iqbal I came across a quotation of Herbert Read. in which he had paid rich tribute to Dr Iqbal—as far my study of Dr. Iqbal goes, I had never heard of Herbert Read in connection with Dr Iqbal, naturally I was intrigued—this started my search for the original article. Failing to find it here, I wrote to the Library of Congress, Washington, explaining my difficulty in locating the said article and requesting for a copy of the same They were prompt enough in sending me a copy of the article entitled: "READERS AND WRITERS" published in "The New Age" dated 25th August 1921. For the first time this article is being published in quarterly "IQBAL REVIEW". (S.A.)

"READERS AND WRITERS"

Good criticism is so rare in our journals that I feel bound to draw attention to it when it does appear. I have in general not too much sympathy for work of Mr. D. H. Lawrence, but an essay of his on Whitman in a recent issue of "The Nation" is to my mind as near perfect criticism as we can expect. The subject, of course, is an inspiring one ; it has not yet been adequately explored and, because it offers no scope for the pedant of prosody, the literary genealogist, and other academic sleuth-hounds, the critic is almost forced to plain speaking and original thought. Mr. Lawrence responds to each of these demands, and though it is not my business to rehearse his ideas, I would like to emphasise a triumph of his analysis, which is the revelation of the extreme significance of that aspects of Whitman's genius best represented in Calamus. "The polarity is between man and man.

Whitman alone of all moderns has known this positively. ... Even Whitman becomes grave, tremulous, before the last

dynamic truth of life. . . . He tells the mystery of manly love, the love of comrades. . . . This comradeship is to be the final cohering principle of the new world, the new Democracy. It is the cohering principle of perfect solidarity. . . . It is the soul's last and most vivid responsibility, the responsibility for the circuit of final friendship, comradeship, manly love." This is true analysis and the poet to whom it is applied, more massive and forceful in his work than any revelation or appreciation can make him, is profound—certainly beyond his own country and time—perhaps beyond our country and time. I do not know: I see but little active understanding of his significance. It is a female age, or an age of female attachment Whitman is self-styled the poet of manly attachment and he will be the poet of a manly age. The greatest modern poet? Yes: I for one agree with Mr. Lawrence and acknowledge his sufficient tribute. And however neglectful we may be consciously of the greatness of this poet, I think that the world unconsciously begins to fulfil Whitman's ideal. He is almost the poet of modern universal unconscious mind. He gives expression to the herd instinct of the male. For man is driven—defensively by the tide of feminine ideas, spontaneously by the aggression of economic factors—to formulate between man and man that fresh aspect of comradeship which, as Whitman said, "hard to define, underlies the lessons and which seems to promise, when thoroughly developed, cultivated and recognised in manners and literature, the most substantial hope and safety of the future. . . ." This feeling was given actuality for Whitman in the American Civil War; and "Drum Taps," the finest war poems known to the world, remain as a testament. And it may be said that the fundamental experience in the recent war among those sensitive to anything fundamental was the birth or renaissance of his manly attachment. But that is something difficult to explain in emotionless prose.

Mr. Lawrence is equally acute in his analysis of Whitman's "element of falsity," for with all his greatness Whitman was not a perfect poet. But that

aspect does not need stress—as romantic boundlessness and pantheistic diliquescence it is obvious enough—and there are aspects of control, of positiveness, of concentration, that outweigh the multiplicity of the included sensations. In, this sensations. In this sense, the best expression of his genius, the most complete definition of his craft, has been written by Whitman himself. It is an unobtrusive footnote hidden among the pages. of "Democratic Vists," and for that reason I may be justified in quoting it:

The culmination and fruit of literary artistic expression, and its final fields of pleasure for the human soul, are in metaphysics, including the mysteries of the spiritual world, the soul itself, and the question of the immortal continuation of our identity In all ages the mind of man has brought up here—and always will here at least, of whatever race or era, we stand on common ground. Applause, too, is unanimous, antique or modern. Those authors who work well in this field—though their reward, instead of a handsome percentage, or royalty, may be but simply the laurel-crown of the victors in the Olympic games —will be dearest, to humanity, and their works, however estheti-, cally, defective, will be treasured for ever. The attitude of literature and poetry has always been religion—and always will be. The Indian Vedas, the Nackas of Zoroaster, the Talmud of the Jews, the Old Testament, the Gospel of Christ and His disciples. Plato's works, the Koran of Mohammed, the Edda of Suorro, and so on toward our own day, to Swedenborg, and to the in-valuable contributions of Liebnitz, Kant, and Hegel—these, with such poems only in which (while singing well of persons and events, of the passions of man, and the shows of the material universel, the religious tone, the consciousness of mystery, the recognition of the future, of unknown, of Deity over and under, all, of the divine purpose, are never absent, but indirectly give tone to all—exhibit literature's real heights and elevations, towering up like great mountains of the earth.

This is a definition of the potentiality of literature rather than of its intrinsic nature. It does not solve—it even naively overrides—the problem of method, of aesthetic expression. ("However esthetically defective" ! Great

works, such as those enumerated, are never aesthetically defective: their energy of thought burns a way, moulds a form.) But subject to these elucidations, this ideal of Whitman's is a critical ideal of workability, of direct use. Applying it here and now, I can think of only one living poet who in any way sustains the test, and almost necessarily he is not of our race and creed. I mean Muhammad Iqbal, whose poem "Asrar-i-Khudi: The Secrets of the Self," has recently been translated from the original Persian by Dr. Reynold Nicholson and published by Messrs. Macmillan. Whilst our native poetasters were rhyming to their intimate coteries about cats and corn-crakes and other homely or unusual variations of a Keatsian theme, there was written and published in Lahore this poem, which, we are told, has taken by storm the younger generation of Indian Moslems. ' Iqbal writes one of them, "has come amongst us as Messiah and has stirred the dead with life." And what catch penny nostrum, you will ask, has thus appealed to the covetous hearts of the market-place ? You will then be told, as I tell you now, that no nostrum, neither of the jingo nor of the salvationist, has wrought this wonder, but a poem that crystalises in its beauty the essential phases of modern philosophy, making a unity of faith out of a multiplicity of ideas, a universal inspiration out of the esoteric logic of the schools.

Iqbal specifically disclaims the influence of Nietzsche but he cannot escape the comparison. The Superman of Nietzsche and the Perfect Man of Iqbal differ only in incidental characteristics, though the former is based on a false sociology of aristocracy, while, the latter is I think, on surer ground in that the ideal aristocrat—the Socrates, the Christ, the Muhammad—is recognised as not social or pre-determined in origin, but a sport of the creative force of nature. the Perfect Man is democratic in origin —"is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is centre of latent power, the possibilities of which developed by cultivating a certain type of character. It is an ideal much nearer to actuality, and in that respect has more affinity to Whitman's Divine Average. But the same initial desire seems to underlie the three ideals: they differ only in prevision. Religiously, is

basis is the belief that man evolves by the attraction of a divine force called God. Scientifically, it is the hypothesis that there is revealed in "the structure of events a creative force which is manifest to consciousness and which will develop the mind's capacity for awareness and understanding. Metaphysically, the scientific and the religious aspects are united: "Life (I quote from Iqbal's introduction to his poem) is a forward assimilative movement. It removes all obstructions in its research by assimilating them. Its essence is the continual creation of desires and ideal, and for the purpose of its preservation and expansion it has invented or developed out of itself certain instruments, e.g., senses, intellect, etc., which help to assimilate obstructions. The greatest obstruction in the way of life is matter. Nature ; yet Nature is not evil, since it enables the inner powers of life to unfold themselves." Life, therefore, is an endeavour for freedom, and the method of endeavour is "the education of the Ego," or as Muhammad himself directed: "Create in yourselves the attributes of God." This reminds one of Whitman: "I am an acme of things accomplished, and I am encloser of things to be." And Whitman also wrote: "In the faces of men and women I see God and in my own face in the glasses," "Fellow creators the creator seeketh" is Nietzsche's expression of the same ideal ; and indeed, all religion and all philosophy ultimately concentrates in this doctrine of the perfection of the self. Man cannot psychologically admit any divinity of which he is not expression. That seems to be a physical truth. Iqbal seems to realise this truth more certainly than Nietzsche or Whitman. Whitman's Divine Average is vague, and not intense enough as an ideal, and Nietzsche's Superman is anti-social and so instinctively false. But Iqbal's Perfect Man is divine average, comrade: his divine average is perfect man—"both idol and worshipper."

HERBERT READ