

THE LITERARY LOUNGER

A DREAMER'S TALES.

IN an age when men's bodies are conveyed at amazing speed beneath water and earth, upon sea and land, and in air far above either; in an age when men's thought would seem by comparison sluggish, less rapturous and profound, lacking a supreme poet; in an age which is, in short, *our* age, how good and satisfying it is to meet with Lord Dunsany between the covers of his book and to follow his telling of "A Dreamer's Tales." Here is no gallant Kipling struggle to abduct Romance by the 9.15. She comes riding down Lord Dunsany's beautiful prose, out of hilly woodlands, cloaked even to the face; and Mr. Sime pictures her so, with a reverent humour and an elaborate grace which make the meeting between author and illustrator one of the most felicitous in the world.

"My mind to me a kingdom is," Dekker sang very proudly, but Lord Dunsany's is the universe, high as the stars, deep as a miner's candle, terrible and lovely with beasts and gods and fairies, with jungle and mountain, with fair cities and "the old wrinkled sea." Not only are these his, he is they, so completely does he absorb their joy or doom. Look with him from the deck of *Bird of the River* as they sail between the tropical banks of Yann, at those little creatures with many legs that "had spread their gauze wings easily on the air, as a man rests his elbows on a balcony." They have become so truly his that in this charming figure he makes them also yours. And presently—"to whom a rainy day had been as an era of war that should desolate continents during all the lifetime of a man." There he has passed from seeing to being. And that is perhaps the secret of the appeal which his art contains on every page. We look at Blagdaros, the broken-down rocking-horse of the dust-heap, and we *are* Blagdaros. We, too, "galloped through Africa," carried St. George, were Bucephalus or Rosinante when in the wild and the whim of the child who was a soul to us. And it was our grief when his body grew big and his soul small, till, seeing gold, he never came again; and our despair to lie cast away among leaky kettles on a waste place strewn with bricks, and our exultation as of battle when an urchin armed with a broom-handle mounted us once again as Cœur de Lion to kill Saladin with all his paynims.

Particularly in the haunting "Carcassonne" is the adventure our very own. The brave adventure, each of us, we know it: to defy Fate and to win to Carcassonne. Carcassonne, own sister to Kubla Khan, and wonderfully similar, though with a soul and an air whereby to recognise her—a city of gleaming ramparts which the fairies built on an evening late in May by blowing their elfin horns. If one were sufficiently resolute to close the book at Arleon's song, and, murmuring "Carcassonne," drop asleep, who knows what might come of it? Surely nowhere, not even—

Where Alph, the sacred river,
Through caverns measureless to man,
Down to a sunless sea—

has Coleridge done anything more remote and more enchanted than that marble bath through which a river tumbled, troubling its deeps. And sometimes in autumn, the snow who swims there, fearfully beautiful, will find it "black with sitch from unimagined mountains, or withered blossoms of mountain-shrubs go beautifully by. When there is blood in the bath, she knows there is war in the mountain," and she sheds tears for loneliness "from eyes that would madden armies, yet will not call her dragons home."

Long ago, on a wet evening in Paris, the writer came upon a pedestal with a fresh wreath hung at the foot of its statue, and the words "Strasbourg | Souviens-toi !" written beside. The great heart of history beat above the jingling and splashing of the cabs in that poignant message from France to her lost city. And Andelsprutz, like Strasbourg, sighed for the land of Aklis, from whom she had been stolen. And when the thirtieth wreath came from her mother—one came yearly, but no success—Andelsprutz went suddenly mad. Decking her hair with the phantoms of cathedrals, she strode away to the mountains. A man saw her there, at first incoherent and mad, then comforted by other great shapes moving in the rain, for it was raining. They were the souls of a great concourse of cities, and presently, "leaning upon Ilion and Carthage, he saw her go mournfully eastwards. And the dust of her highways swirled behind her as she went, a ghostly dust that never turned to mud in all that dreching rain." Mr. Sime's drawing lies between the pages of this story like a curious ornament on a fair breast.

With no weird to dree, the Ancient Mariner might have told of those "Idle Days on the Yann"—always excepting their humour, for that is a quality most peculiarly Lord Dunsany's. Of a serpent's wisdom with the harmlessness of the dove, it laughs in the lyrical setting with the joy of an archaic drawing. He has only to remember the Captain's scimitar that splintered the deck in the heat of the bargain, or the voter imprisoned by the poet on the downs who cried for his polling-booth like a child.

All this is of the most scrappy; scarcely a label to a rare vintage. But Lord Dunsany tells somewhere of how he felt at sight of the Yann passing through its gates of pink-marble cliff, mountain-high, to "the azure indescribable sea." It was to me, he says, "as some chord of music that a master's hand had launched from the violin, and which carries to Heaven or Faëry the tremulous spirits of men." And the men whom he also has translated cannot praise him better. Very narrowly will he escape the cry—

Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his archaic smile!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honeydew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.



"WE WOULD GALLOP THROUGH AFRICA," A SIME ILLUSTRATION TO LORD DUNSANY'S "A DREAMER'S TALES."

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THE SKETCH SUPPLEMENT



WITH HAIR DECKED WITH THE PHANTASMS OF CATHEDRALS: "THE SOUL OF ANDELSPRUTZ."

"Andelsprutz went suddenly mad. All the bells clanged hideously in the belleries, horses bolted in the streets, the dogs all howled, the stolid conquerors awoke and turned in their beds and slept again; and I saw the grey shadowy form of Andelsprutz rise up, decking her hair with the phantasms of cathedrals, and stride away from her city." An illustration, by S. H. Stone, for Lord Dunsany's "A Dreamer's Tales"; reproduced by courtesy of the artist and of the publishers, Messrs. George Allen and Sons. (See "Literary Lounge.")