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D. H. LAWRENCE'S DARK AND VEHEMENT GENIUS

-the first of three pages-

OF the group of younger English novelists now challenging critical attention, D. H. Lawrence, author of "Sons and Lovers," "Women in Love" and "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," is surely the most startling and in some ways the most interesting. He has been the subject of many articles in leading English reviews and is now, through the publishing house of Thomas Seltzer, introduced to American readers. There is something arresting in the very divergence of opinion regarding him. We find, for instance, Frank Harris putting Lawrence "in the foremost rank of living authors," and Sherwood Anderson calling him "this greatest of living English prose writers." On the other hand, Henry L. Mencken dismisses "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious" as an "effective if unwitting *reductio ad absurdum* of the current doctrine that Lawrence is a profound thinker. His book is not merely bad; it is downright childish." The verdicts of other critics just as contradictory might be multiplied.

Why, asks John Peale Bishop in *Vanity Fair* (New York), should this wide divergence of opinion exist? In attempting to answer the question, Mr. Bishop speaks, first of all, of Lawrence's preoccupation with physical love, which frightens some and disposes others unduly in his favor. Then, too, his talent, being original and unrestrained, is hard to gauge. "The Lost Girl," one of his recent novels, may, perhaps, be considered as a study of manners, treating of certain very credible middle-class English people of the midlands, and a roving band of alien vaudeville performers. But to approach "Women in Love" as a realistic study of manners is, in Mr. Bishop's view, to have the book crumble at one's touch. Moreover, Lawrence's work is extremely uneven. "The Trespasser" is pronounced by Mr. Bishop one of the shoddiest novels that he has ever read, while "The Rainbow," he says, has scene after scene of all but overwhelming beauty. "But I believe," Mr. Bishop continues, "that the real reason Lawrence fares so badly at the hands of certain excellent critics, such as Mr. Mencken, for example, is that these critics are interested only in the ideas of an intellectual aristocracy and, inversely, in the stupidities of the mob. Lawrence's approach both to life and his art is essentially emotional; his understanding comes of having remembered all that his imagination and intuition discerned while under the subjection of emotion. That is to say, he is, at his best, a poet, even in his novels."

Lawrence, as this American writer presents him, is a man who has seen, or who thinks he has seen, the disintegration of ideas which inspired the best minds of the nineteenth century. He has watched the decay of Victorian ideals of social equality, of human brotherhood and Christian love. But where another man might have fallen into a sterile despair, he remains unperturbed. His interest is not so much in ideas or ideals as in "the amazingly difficult and vital business of human relationships," and particularly in those relationships which are ultimately sensual. He is "like those modern sculptors who, feeling that civilization has reached its last refinement, and that there is no more work left for observation to do, have gone back to the crude beginnings of stone-carving to learn again the essentials of their art from Assyrian friezes and the crudely stylized sculptures of West Africa." Mr. Bishop goes on to illustrate this point by quoting a passage in "Women in Love" in which the author introduces, in Halladay's flat, wood carvings from Africa, one of a naked woman, crouched in a strange posture, distorted by pain.

"There Gerald 'saw vividly with his spirit the gray forward-stretching face

GIFTED, BUT PERVERSE

-the second of three pages-

of the negro woman, African and tense, abstracted in utter physical stress. It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath.

"'Why is it art?' Gerald asked, shocked, resentful.

"'It conveys a complete truth,' said Birkin. 'It contains the whole truth of that state whatever you feel about it.'

"'But you can't call it high art,' said Gerald.

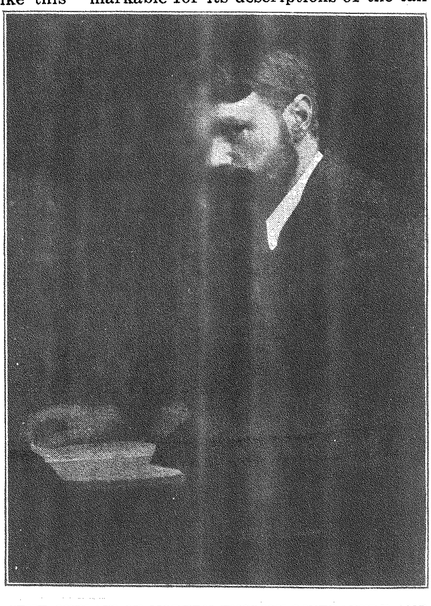
"'High! there are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in the straight line behind that carving; it is an awful pitch of culture, of a definite sort. . . . Pure culture in sensation, culture in a physical consciousness, really ultimate physical consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual.'"

In its purest form Lawrence's art, Mr. Bishop tells us, is not unlike this savage carving. "He is evidently a man of tremendous capacities for emotion, variously sensitive to nervous impressions. He has brooded over his own intimate relationship and carefully observed the processes of his own sex life. He has read Freud and has availed himself of the knowledge Freud has liberated, using it, not as a substitute for thinking, but to corroborate his own broodings. Love to him is not the laughing golden-haired Anadyomene, but the dark and terrible Cybele, the many-breasted Earth Mother, mutilating her votaries. The struggle in which almost every one of his characters is most deeply involved is to come to fulfillment through love, without losing identity as an individual. And Lawrence invests this struggle with tragic possibilities."

Mr. Bishop does not mean to imply that this is all there is to Lawrence, but he does mean to indicate what seems to him the essential core:

"The sum of his wisdom is this: that it would be the wisest of actions for a man to put aside his wisdom, as if it were a shabby, stifling garment, and in nakedness to touch and close with the dark, vindictive life of the earth, and that better even than this it would be if mankind were utterly destroyed and only the older inhuman world were left." This attitude receives its fullest expression in his poems, in those poems which are not written in accordance with his absurdly inadequate theory of poetry, and in 'Women in Love' where his philosophy is everywhere explicit."

Even in a travel book, "Sea and Sardinia," Lawrence cannot elude the cruelty of things and the seriousness of the combat. This account of a Mediterranean voyage, Mr. Bishop says, is remarkable for its descriptions of the tall



"THE OUTLAW OF MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND THE MOST INTERESTING FIGURE IN IT"

So John Middleton Murry sums up D. H. Lawrence, the author of "Sons and Lovers," "The Rainbow" and "Women in Love."

-the last of three pages-

coasts of Italy, of the hard and primitive island of Sardinia, of the peasants, still clinging implacably to a medieval individualism, the men proudly dressed in the old magpie motley, black and white, the women in stiff spreading dresses of mauve and vermilion like Velasquez princesses. It is brilliant, but is never serene. There is always a sense of torment and of the old pagan terror of places as if Etna were, as Lawrence says, a mistress "low, white, witchlike under heaven—with her strange winds prowling round like Circe's panthers, some black, some white."

It is serenity, Mr. Bishop concludes, which one misses most in Lawrence, serenity and intellectual control of his material. "He is never, save at moments, entirely satisfactory. One wearies of the emotionalism, the welter of words, the disorder and the turmoil. He is the typical English genius, beautiful and profound, fragmentary, touching the absurd."

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