

A Book of Satyrs.



BY AUSTIN O. SPARE.



A BOOK OF SATYRS.

By Austin Osman Spare.





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THIS BOOK HAVE BEEN PRINTED

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SIGNED *W. L. G. Spence* PUB. A.D. 1907.



PRINTED AND ISSUED BY THE COOPERATIVE PRINTING SOCIETY LIMITED, TUDOR ST., LONDON, E.C.



INTRODUCTION

The field of black and white art has been generously extended since that golden period in the "eighties" when Walker and Pinwell and Millais wrought their quiet designs, although their olden delicacy of interpretation (for us almost wholly in the hands of Clemance Housman) can still claim charms which our more facile method can never attain. For every such accomplished craft is the companion of an aristocracy of art, even if it is compelled to prayer and fasting before serving fittingly the high expression which is exhaustive of every resource; but it shares, on the other hand, with commoner orders of art its own eloquence and dignity. Thus all advantages we now possess of rapid, literal, and cheap reproduction open the way to an easier acceptance of art which is habited with more grace than profundity, more fancy than imagination, and inclines us to postpone indefinitely what is only acquired at more pain and cost.

Perhaps these reasons sufficiently explain the absence, among so much that hints at greater artistic personality, of the remote, and the strange, and the unadaptable. There would seem, indeed, to exist a guiding science supplanting natural selection where the popular interest is concerned : as though some ingenious financier had made an abiding tabulation or arithmetic of invariable demands, in hope to subdue the purposes of his race every ebullience feeble enough to lay its own destiny aside, and trim its shape to the recognised gauge. Outside such an order all the free forces of art move-some hovering in uncertain intention, momentarily liable to that mundane gravitation which invites their indecision; others, like Spare, naturally and definitely in possession of themselves, are hardly compelled even within that reckoning to which isolated evidences of their mode tempt the scientific.

The "Earth" Book of Spare was an elemental and chaotic thing, full of significant art, and of still more significant conception. So mighty a theme may only remain littered with fragments, each, like the Sphinx, an unread riddle, existing in the mind amid a turmoil of unaccustomed thought. But the present series of designs occupies the more circumscribed area of local allegory on a physical plane, the artist aiming not only to stir the optical centres by agreeable contours and adjacencies, when he adjusts with powerful deliberation the actual to a purpose which extends in his mind beyond executive considerations. For that is a narrow scope to which some would compel art, as though a predisposition to beauty were the sole equipment desirable for the expression of life. Popular art, in the sense that this book can never be popular, arises, indeed, from an extraordinary pessimism : it is an unwholesome flattery of the environment and circumstance from out whose grip the man at length emerges equipped for faith by knowledge. And Spare, with the unflinching assurance of the optimist as to the ultimate, treads with reforming energy where the effeminate and parsonic would whimper or weep helplessly. His is no gently-advancing theory, but his satires (or satyrs, as he loves to call them) arrive as full-fledged and assertive dogma. The designs have their claim upon the imagination also, not from a visionary cast given by obscure shapes or heavy mystification, but by reason of clearly incisive and circumstantial detail, informed

nevertheless, with so psychic an intention that the familiar is made to be the haunt of what is startling and indeterminable.

In his art Spare continually achieves the unexpected ; his pattern is always original ; his characteristic line is of fine nervous quality ; his types are powerfully visualised. The very subtle irony of his temper is apparent in a hundred whimsical ways-in attitudes, gestures, expressions-too delicate to be more than contributory to the whole impression. This appropriate irony especially fits Spare for satire, and it is here to be seen and felt, for it can neither be disregarded nor forgotten-which words it is well to be able to write of one satirist in our day of curbed enthusiasm and polite art.

JAMES GUTHRIE



INTRODUCTION.





THE CHURCH.





EXISTENCE.





QUACKERY.





INTEMPERANCE.





FASHION.





THE CONNOISSEUR.





POLITICS.





THE BEAUTY DOCTOR.



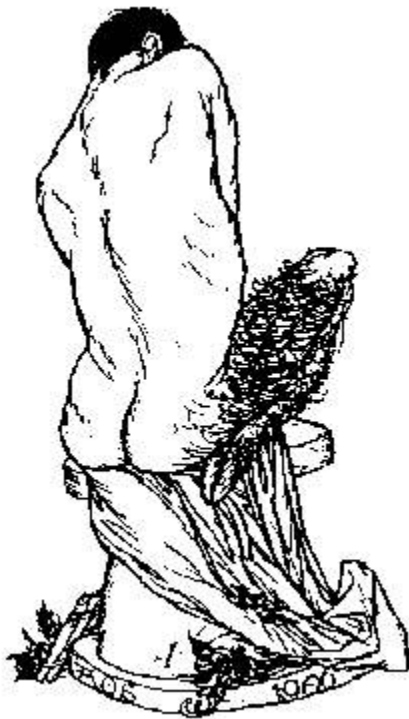


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