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The Divine Adventure

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THE DIVINE ADVENTURE.

By FIONA MACLEOD. Chapman and Hall.

There are many things in this book which everyone can enjoy. In the tale which gives title to the volume and in "Iona" there is a graver and more restrained use of that rhetorical eloquence which Miss Macleod perhaps finds it too easy to employ. If at times we find only vagueness where a mystic meaning was intended, there is also genuine imagination and frequent beauty of thought and style. It is to be regretted, I think, that in one essay, to which Miss Macleod attaches great importance, she has departed from her peculiar sphere of elemental passion and psychic nature, and given us a semi-political lecture on the Celtic movement in literature, which is distinctly controversial and out of place in a book otherwise inspired by the artist's desire to shape a vision in a beautiful way. This essay is irritating, and, indeed, gives the impression that it is intended to irritate. Arrogance and shallowness of judgment veil themselves under a mask of lofty idealism. She considers that we, as an Irish people, should abandon our "pseudo-nationalism," and have an honest pride in being British—there every spiritual ideal will be fulfilled. We are not to perpetuate feuds—of course the inference being that we are in the wrong and the Briton plays the virtuous part. We are not to try to win back what is gone away upon the wind, but do our duty in that state of life to which it has pleased the British statesman to call us. Miss Macleod speaks for the Scottish Celt also; and, indeed, it is hard to see what else he could do: but in Ireland the vast majority of thinking people are determined that they shall not be anglicised; and this determination is, I think, not contrary to any ideal of human brotherhood, but is just and divinely implanted in our breasts. We do our best for ourselves, for the world, nay, for the very race whose dominance Miss Macleod pleads for, by remaining true to ourselves, by finding in our hearts that reason for our separate being which exists alike in races as in individuals; and having found it to act from our own wills and from our own centre. Her plaintive remonstrance with our irreconcilability makes one think of a lion complaining that the traveller he wishes to eat is unduly hostile. Why will he not quietly consent to be amalgamated? How wrong of him to struggle with such immoral bitterness!

If the Celtic movement has "any inherent force it will not destroy itself in forlorn hopes but fall into line"—with English literature. Why, to name a spiritual man is to name the leader of a forlorn hope. I can imagine Miss Macleod counselling with her superior air, the authors of the Gospels. "Why do you rail against the Scribes and Pharisees? Is it not unbrotherly? And as you are writing in Greek is it not better to conform to the traditions of Greek literature? Why lead a forlorn hope against the influence of what is so perfect?" It is perhaps like a woman to advise a cheap peace between race and race, but I think there are times when hate is a nobler feeling than friendship, when we feel, with Whitman, confidence in the revolutionary instinct contrary to all bourgeois ideas of what is fit and right:

"Pale, silent, stern, what could I say to that long accrued retribution?

Could I wish humanity different?

Could I wish people made of wood and stone?

Or that there be no justice in destiny or time?"

It is our fortune or misfortune that we speak or write in English; but does that mean that the only place for our Irish writers is in English literature? The Gospels would be Greek literature on that assumption, and Whitman ought to find a place on our shelves as an English poet. "Everything not English is provincial," says Miss Macleod. But is not English literature concerned with English things mainly, and is it not also provincial? I remember the complaint of Matthew Arnold, perhaps the sanest critic of his countrymen, that the bulk of their literature had just this very note of provinciality. He expressed himself also with modesty, and defined his meaning, and did not issue a ukase after the manner of Miss Macleod. But what are we to think of her when she declares that there is no racial road to beauty, or when she seems unable to distinguish English emotion from Celtic emotion, or from Hindu emotion? She seems devoid of the faculty of analysis or the power of seeing distinctions, not even subtle distinctions, but glaring ones. She would probably see no difference between the Parthenon and a Gothic Cathedral. It is all beautiful, and that is enough to sav of it. Or she would ignore the diversity in the rainbow: the differences of colour are unimportant: it is all

light. Have races no peculiar message to deliver as individuals have? It is illogical to deny one if we grant the other; and even Miss Macleod would hardly go so far as to say there is "only a difference in contour and colour" between the message of Christ and the message of Shakespeare. The fact is Miss Macleod has very confused ideas when she begins to think rather than tell a story, and to reason rather than imagine. It would be possible to analyse in this way sentence after sentence of her essay, which, probably because it is the most superficial writing of the author, has been hailed with a chorus of approval by the English Press. The good Briton, puzzled by this portent, the Celtic movement in literature, which was spiritual, therefore incomprehensible to him, read this essay and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. He was as far from understanding Celtic things as before, despite his visionary faculty, which Miss Macleod refers to with enthusiasm; but this he did understand from the essay, that there were to be no more wild Irish; that he was not to be troubled further with revolt or plain speaking; the truth would be modified to suit his capacity for receiving it: this beautiful crown of strange jewels was to be placed on his brow, and so he beamed in his good-natured way and thought it might be permitted. It is to be hoped in the future if Miss Macleod wishes to write semi-political essays she will speak only for the Scottish Celt. We are a strange people over here and we dislike being preached to by foreigners.

A. E.

The following are a few of the passages to which A. E. takes such strong exception. We shall publish presently an estimate of the value of Miss Macleod's book, of a quite different character, from another contributor.—Ed.

THE DIVINE ADVENTURE.

By FIONA MACLEOD. Chapman and Hall.

From the beginning of her remarkable career till now Miss Fiona Macleod has done nothing so beautiful and lofty as this wonderful book. I shall, perhaps, speak of it again; and, in particular, would wish to dwell upon her chapters called Iona—chapters so full of spiritual light, not raying out aimlessly into the void but clothing reality and life with beauty, that it is no exaggeration to describe them as adding a new sacredness to the Mecca of the Gael. But for the present I must content myself with quoting a very striking utterance from the last essay in the book, an essay entitled "Celtic," in which Miss Macleod shows that her keen insight does not fail her in a region of thought far removed from that into which she has hitherto taken her readers. A Celt of the Celt, and possessed as no other writer of our time is possessed with a sense of the faculty and mission of the Celt, she shows here not only deep intuition but the power "to see life steadily and see it whole," of which the Celt, in this country at least, must acquire some greater measure before his flame can burn with any but a destructive power. Miss Macleod writes:—

"So far as I understand the 'Celtic Movement,' it is a natural outcome, the natural expression of a freshly inspired spiritual and artistic energy. That this expression is coloured by racial temperament is its distinction; that it is controlled to novel usage is its opportunity. When we look for its source we find it in the usufruct of an ancient and beautiful treasure of national tradition. One may the more aptly speak thus collectively of a mythology and a literature, and a vast and wonderful legendary folk-lore, since to us, now, it is in great part hidden behind veils of an all but forgotten tongue and of a system of life and customs, ideas and thought, that no longer obtains.

"I am unable, however, to see that it has sustenance in element of revolt. A new movement should not be a revolt, but a sortie to carry a fresh position. When one hears, as one does every now and then, that the Celtic movement is a revolt against the tyranny of the English tradition, one can but smile; as though a plaster-cast, that is of to-day, were to revolt against the Venus of Milo or the Winged Victory, that is of no day. If a movement has any inherent force, it will not destroy itself in forlorn hopes, but will fall into line, and so achieve where alone the desired success can be achieved.

"There is no racial road to beauty, nor to any excellence. Genius, which leads thither, beckon neither to tribe nor clan, neither to school nor movement, but only to one soul here and to another there; so that the Iclander hears and speaks

in Saga, and the brown Malay hears and carves delicately in ivory; and the men in Europe, from the Serb and the Finn to the Basque and the Breton, hear, and each in his kind answers; and what the Englishman says in song and romance and the deep utterance of his complex life, his mountain-kindred say in mabinogi or sgeul.

"But above all else it is time that a prevalent pseudo-nationalism should be dissuaded. I am proud to be a Highlander, but I would not side with those who would set the heather on fire. If I were Irish, I would be proud, but I would not lower my pride by marrying it to a ceaseless ill-will, an irreconcilable hate, for there can be a nobler pride in unvanquished acquiescence than in revolt. I would be proud if I were Welsh, but I would not refuse to learn English, or to mix with English as equals. And proud as I might be to be Highland or Scottish or Irish or Welsh or English, I would be more proud to be British—for, there at last, we have a bond to unite us all, and to give us space for every ideal, whether communal or individual, whether national or spiritual.

"The Celtic element in our national life has a vital and great part to play. We have a most noble ideal if we will but accept it. And that is, not to perpetuate feuds, not to try to win back what is gone away upon the wind, not to repay ignorance with scorn, or dulness with contempt, or past wrongs with present hatred, but so to live, so to pray, so to hope, so to work, so to achieve, that we, what is left of the Celtic races, of the Celtic genius, may permeate the greater race of which we are a vital part, so that with this Celtic emotion, Celtic love of beauty, and Celtic spirituality a nation greater than any the world has seen may issue, a nation refined and strengthened by the wise relinquishings and steadfast ideals of Celt and Saxon, united in a common fatherland, and in singleness of pride and faith."

Well and wisely said—except for one little word. Why does Miss Macleod write of a system of life, &c., that no longer "obtains"? This bit of cockneyism or journalism or whatever it is occurs two or three times in this essay, and it gives the effect of a patch by no means purple in the fine texture of Miss Macleod's English.

J. S.

TENDERNESSE.

If the Christ-child came to you or me
Just like a little, human child,
When the streets were hoar and white to see,
And the east wind whistled sharp and wild?
We would cleanse his feet from frost and mire
And give him to eat of wholesome fare,
We would put him to sit by the ruddy fire,
And bid him rule as a monarch there.

But the Babe might come and we know him not,
And the worldly thought in our hearts hold sway;
And the gentle Christ-child would be forgot
In the ragged waif that we turned away.
Ah! dear one, trim you the beacon light,
And lend your ear when the outcast cries,
For the Christ-child wanders abroad to-night,
And he looketh ever through childhood's eyes.

FIRST OF SPRING.

A new voice in the woods to-day,
A new voice on the hill:
The waving of a leafy spray,
The murmur of a rill.

A new heart in the grey old world,
A light upon the sea:
A tiny flag of green unfurled,
A gush of song for me.

THE CHILD OF THE AGES.

In every heart a song all words above,
And deeds of valour in the infant arm;
And old enchanter, wielding spell and charm,
May dwell beneath the darling head I love.

Aye, far behind these eyes of childish grey
Imperial cities crumble stone on stone,
And men revolve 'mid laughter, tear, and groan
And grow to strength through passion and decay.

How do I know what guest my house receives,
Or what strange secrets slumber in thy heart?
O child of mystery and things apart
Who sleepest now beneath these quiet eaves

CORRESPONDENCE.

July 5th, 1900.

DEAR A. I. R.—I have often thought of writing to congratulate you, or rather to congratulate your readers. I like you, because you are Irish in a sense in which very few of your contemporaries are. My ideal paper is National without being "Nationalistic," and you come as near that ideal as possible—far nearer than any other Irish periodical except "An t-Euphras." But thereby hangs a tale which I have neither space nor motive to tell. My faith in the practicability of realising ideals of Irish National spirit has been rudely shaken by my own experiences. The word "sectarian" seems to be written over all things in this unfortunate land. All things, that is, except "A. I. R.," which is fresh and free.

This "unsolicited testimonial" may not be worth much, but I thought it incumbent on me to add it to the many more valuable ones given you.

I enclose a poem for "A. I. R.," which I hope you will find fit for publication.—Yours, sincerely,

J. BARTLEY SHEA.

TANIT.

I.

When the golden morning issues forth in glory
From the sombre eaves of night,
And decks the bald old brows of mountains hoary
With golden locks of light,
A great glad flood of rapture breaks upon me,
A wayward nameless joy
From above;
The ecstasy of careless youth is on me,
The rapture of a boy
In his love!
Thus in morning's bright awaking,
When fair Nature's glories throng,
When the small birds tunes are making
From the brook the key-note taking of their song
Do I feel thee in the balmy morning breeze,
In the haze that swathes the valley and the trees,
And thy presence makes me strong!

II.

When the dreamy twilight thickens on the meadows,
And the branches drip with dew
I feel a mystic presence 'mong the shadows
With a yearning strangely new;
I hear the throbbing of a heart beside me,
I see bright eyes that shine
In the gloom,
The beck'nings of a phantom finger guide me,
My spirit follows thine
To my doom!
Thus in silence of the gloaming
When the very air is still,
When the weary birds are coming
From their roving and their roaming on the hill
Do I hear thee in the whispers of the trees,
In the drowsy hum and murmur of the bees,
And thy presence sways my will!

J. B. SHEA.

Thanks for this beautiful suggestive poem. I suspect your secret is concealed in the title and shall not ask what it means.—Ed.

If I did not think that my subscription for another quarter was sufficiently eloquent, I should be inclined to say how much I enjoy reading the "A. I. R." It is always interesting, and the only fault I find with it is its brevity.

T. G. K.

Sunday morning would not be a day of rest if my "All Ireland Review" did not arrive before breakfast as it is part of my breakfast and part of my rest. May it go on and prosper!

J. G.

I wish it were ten times as good, for the sake of the many kind, clever, and sympathetic friends who have gathered around me in this singular enterprise, in the conduct of which—and I must conduct it according to my own lights—all the signals exhibit "danger."

I wish my friends to understand clearly that I intend to emerge out of this business either in ruins or as the absolute commander of a centre of Irish independent intellectual light and influence.—Ed.