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A Book for Burning.

By James Douglas.

Some time ago, when our highbrows, or, as they are pleased to call themselves, our intelligentsia, were all praising James Joyce's "Ulysses," I ventured to put it in the pillory as the pinnacle and apex of lubricity and obscenity. But the praise of our highbrows has made it possible for a respectable publisher to hurl into the British home a novel which is modeled upon that scabrous outrage. There are two methods of dealing with pornographic fiction. One is to ignore it lest publicity should inflate its sales. The other method is to raise public opinion so effectively that the book is either withdrawn from circulation by the publisher or is confiscated by public authority

The Liberty of Art

There is much to be said for the first method. No critic ought to puff a vile book by advertising its vileness. Moreover, no critic ought to narrow the liberty of literature or fetter the art of the artist. If there be a doubt, freedom ought to be given the benefit. On the other hand, if pornographic novels are ignored they tend to become more pornographic. They quickly expand their licence. The effect upon young writers is injurious, for they are tempted to mistake salacity for modernity, obscenity for daring, indecency for independence. Thus the art of the artist is doubly damaged. When the public revolt against the revolting, all artists are tarred with the same brush. The liberty of art is unreasonably curtailed. The pendulum swings from the extreme of licence to the extreme of prudery. And the profession of letters is smirched and soiled by its association with moral lepers.

Ecstatic Eulogy

I have therefore determined to adopt the second method, and to do my best to secure the immediate extirpation of "The

Diary of a Drug Fiend" (Collins, 7 /6 net) by Aleister Crowley. It is a novel describing the orgies of vice practised by a group of moral degenerates who stimulate their degraded lusts by doses of cocaine and heroin. Although there is an attempt to pretend that the book is merely a study of the depravation caused by cocaine, in reality it is an ecstatic eulogy of the drug and of its effects upon the body and the mind. A cocaine trafficker would welcome it as a recruiting agent which would bring him thousands of new victims. "Nobody," we are told, "would be really much the worse for a night with the drug provided that he had the sense to spend the next day in a Turkish bath, and build up with food and a double allowance of sleep." Again: "Until you have got your mouth full of cocaine you don't know what kissing is." And so forth.

Cunning Blasphemies

The characters of the novel are repulsive. For instance:—

The slight figure of a young-old man with a bulbous nose to detract from his otherwise remarkable beauty, spoilt though it was by years of insane passions, came into the café. One got the impression of some filthy creature of the darkness. At his heels lumbered his jackal, a huge, bloated, verminous creature like a cockroach, in shabby black clothes, his face bloated and pimpled, a horrible leer on his dripping mouth, with its furniture like a bombed graveyard. . . .

The first of these women was a fat, bold, red-headed slut. She reminded me of a white maggot.

The gospel preached by the book is this: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law." The obscenities are flavoured with cunning blasphemies:—

She offered me a pinch of heroin with the air of communicating some exquisitely esoteric sacrament. . . . The act of consummation was, so to speak, an act of religion. If it was the very fact that it was not an act of necessity which made it an act of piety. It was a commemoration like the Protestant communion, and at the same time a consecration like the Catholic.

There is even a parody of the Creed. At the baser and more bestial horrors of the book it is impossible, even if it were desirable, to hint.

It may be asked how such a book could secure publisher. Well, few publishers have time to read t the books which they publish, and even their readers some times read them hastily. I imagine that this book secure publication in the guise of an ex-

posure of the evils wrought by drugs. But its true character is stamped on it in spite of its ingenious use of innuendo and artifice. It is a book that ought to be burned. Why lock up cocaine-traffickers if we tolerate cocaine novels?