

*A book review by Aleister Crowley from the September 1917 edition of The International.*

***A Chaste Man*** by Louis U. Wilkinson. Alfred A. Knopf, 1917.

Mr. Wilkinson's new book is a distinct advance on "The Buffoon." In that work he showed himself as a novelist of manners of great excellence, but, he gave no indication of his new development. The new book places him among the supreme masters of tragedy. He is not merely equal to the greatest of the Russians, but superior to them; for the worst tragedies of Russia can never equal those of England. Russia, at the very worst, is a place where something happens. In England lives are ruined by the hundred thousand through the fact that nothing happens or ever can happen. Even the war seems to leave but a superficial impression.

The book opens by showing us the hero duly reminding Mr. Somebody that this is the third application, etc., and that unless, etc., and remains his faithfully. Despite the enthralling adventure described in the book, the hero has not enough sense to live up to his opportunities. As a result he is found on the last page still reminding Mr. Somebody that this is the third application, etc. People have got so habituated to this sort of thing that they seem to have lost consciousness of its horror.

There is practically no difference between the life of a pauper and that of a young man in a good situation like the hero of this book. Life should be intolerable without hope in youth of doing worthy things, and memory in age of worthy things accomplished. Under the modern industrial system 95 per cent of the population never get a chance either for hope or memory. Yet life is not intolerable to them, for the virile spirit has been destroyed by generations of "propriety."

In this novel is conveyed with overwhelming power the tremendous moral lesson that a man, by refusing to

grasp the nettle of fate, not only fails in himself, but ruins others. The final tragedy of the girl Olga is indeed most pitiful. Yet, it is a tragedy which happens every day. That, in fact, raises one's sense of pity from the personal to the cosmic. One begins to realize the appalling price that has to be paid for cheap clothes and what are absurdly called the conveniences of life.

If people could awake to a true sense of the universe, they would understand that a year in the trenches is much better than a year in the comfortable home. The ancients knew that the soul must be purged by pity and terror; and these are just the elements against which modern civilization has been striving. The cosmic catastrophe in which it has been involved is the only good thing about it. Comfort, regularity, peace are the most dreadful enemies of the soul.

If I look back upon my life, I find that the only things worth remembering are the adventures, the times when I was undergoing incredible hardships, when I was in hourly peril of immediate death. Of course, it may be different if one is a tame animal; but how dreadful a thing it is to be tame!

This book is written with sublime simplicity, with that art which conceals art. Every page is interesting in itself, yet every incident is duly subordinate to the brooding horror of the main theme. The Buddhists say that the three great enemies of the soul are greed, hatred and dullness. How could one better describe life in a modern city? Dr. Wilkinson has seized upon this gruesome theme with the aplomb of a master. Without a high-pitched voice, without violence or didacticism, he lays bare the corpse of our modern death-in-life.