

PROSE POEMS. BY CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

TRANSLATED BY ALEISTER CROWLEY.

THE DESPAIR OF THE OLD WOMAN.

THE little, shrivelled-up old woman felt herself happy again in looking on this pretty child, to whom everyone was paying court; whom everyone was trying to please; this pretty creature, as fragile as the little old woman herself, and like her, too, without teeth or hair. And she approached it, wishing to make her laughter like a little child's, and pleasing faces. But the frightened baby struggled in the arms of the kind hag, and filled the house with its screams. Then the good old woman withdrew herself again into her eternal solitude, and wept in a corner, saying to herself, "Ah, for us unfortunate old women the age is past when we can please even the innocent; and we frighten the little children that we wish to love."

EVERYONE HAS HIS OWN CHIMERA.

Beneath the great grey sky in a vast and dusty plain that hath no road nor grass, without one thistle, without one nettle, I met several men walking, bowed down.

Each of them bore upon his back an enormous chimera; as heavy as a sack of corn or coal, or the heavy marching kit of a Roman infantry-man.

But the monstrous burden was not dead-weight. On the contrary, it wrapped round and oppressed the men with its powerful and elastic muscles; it clutched with its

two great claws at the breast of its mount, and its fabled head crowned the forehead of the man like one of those horrific helmets by which the warriors of old times hoped to add to the terror of the enemy.

I questioned one of these men and asked him where they were going. He answered me that he knew nothing of this, nor he, nor the others, but that evidently they were going somewhere, since they were driven by an invincible need of going on. A curious feature was that none of these travellers appeared to be irritated with the frightful beast that was hung at his neck, glued to his back. One would have said that he considered it as an integral portion of himself. All these weary and serious faces witnessed to no despair; under the splenic cupola of heaven their feet plunged in the dust of a ground as desolate as that heaven itself. They went on their way with the resigned look of those who are damned to hope eternally.

And the caravan passed beside me and hid itself in the atmosphere of the horizon, at that point where the rounded surface of the planet withdraws itself from the curiosity of man.

For some moments I obstinately strove to understand this mystery, but soon irresistible Indifference settled upon me, and I was more heavily weighed down by it than they themselves were by their crushing chimeras.