

**SONNETS
TO A LADY**

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Sonnets to a Lady by Ernest Druce

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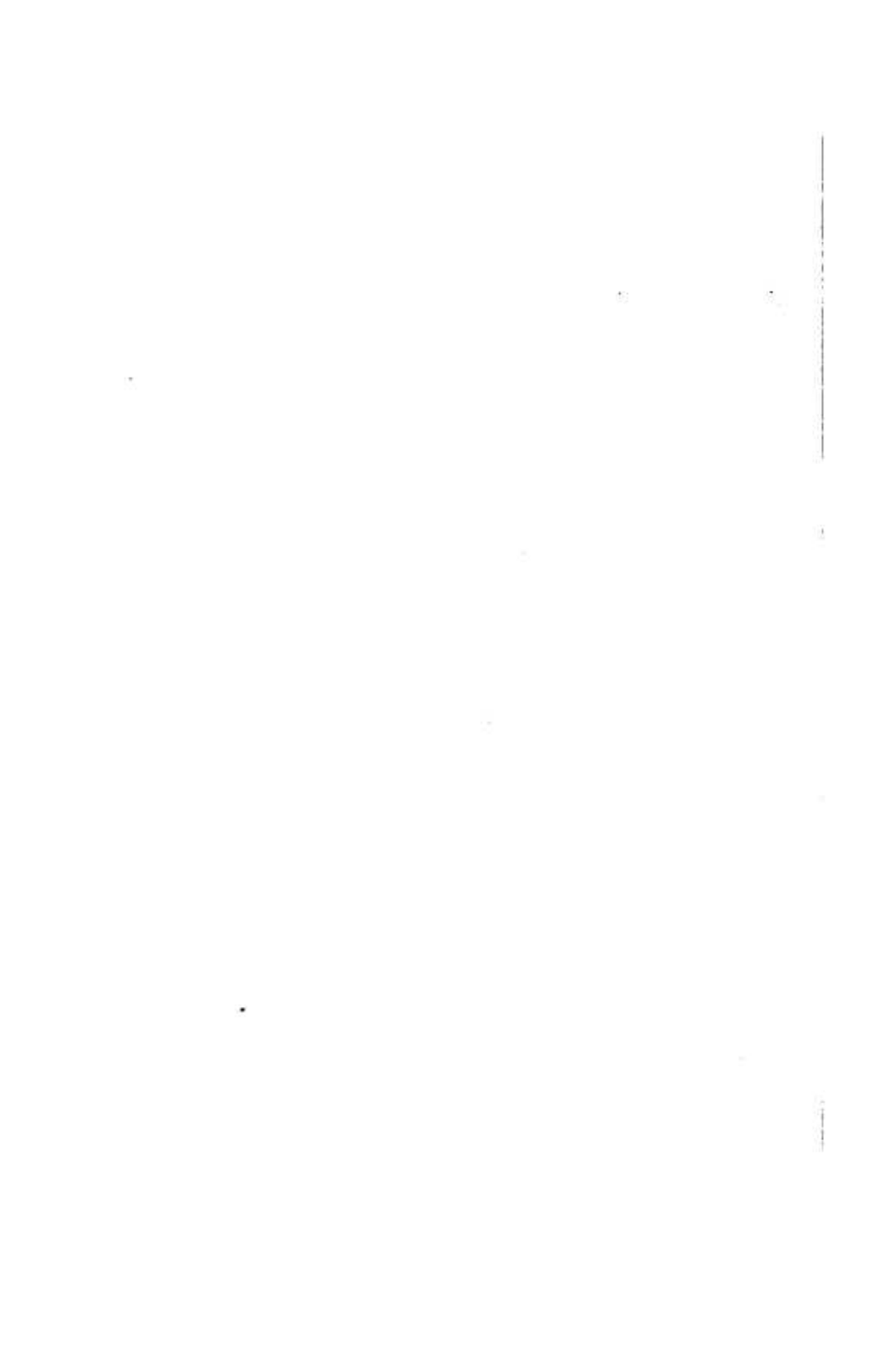
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ERNEST DRUCE

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By
Ernest Druce

"Σκοπεῖσθαι δεῖ, εἰ τι πρὸς ἐκείνω τέλπει, πρὸς τὸ ποιεῖν κατιδέειν
ῥῆον τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν. τέλπει δέ, φαμέν, πάντα ἀνθρώποι, ὅσα
ἀναγκάζει ψυχὴν εἰς ἐκείνων τὸν τόπον μεταστρέφεισθαι ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶ τὸ
εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ βίου, ὃ δεῖ αὐτὴν παντὶ τρόπῳ ἰδεῖν."

PLATO, *Repub.*, Book VII.

"E se le fantasie nostre son basse
A tanta altezza, non è maraviglia."

DANTE, *Parad.* x. 46.



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Preface

POETRY rightly so called is the expression and play of pure intellect busying itself with forms of the beautiful which it contemplates in their permanent and unchanging relations. It inhabits the sphere of ideas, which it attains to by passing from the imperfect manifestations of them in visible things to the essential conceptions of which the objects around us bear more or less clearly defined traces. Thus we are conscious of goodness in action or character, and the contemplation of that quality in the particular instance can raise our thoughts to the conception of the ideal, that is to say, of the Divine Goodness. It is the same with other qualities which excite our admiration or the reverse; but more particularly does this statement hold good with respect to the Beautiful and its various manifestations. Who has not felt the peculiar and soul-shaking emotion which is some-

times occasioned by the mere passing glimpse of a beautiful woman's face? Nor is this emotion only to be attributed to the natural attraction of the sexes. The highest kind of beauty, which is to be seen nowhere but in the human face, and consequently nowhere so perfectly as in the face of woman, exercises a species of attraction which appeals to the whole soul and intellect. Of all known motive powers, it lays hold of the being of man most strongly, and, in a wholly unexplained manner, forces him for a time to raise himself into those higher regions of the ideal where the world of the becoming and the passing (*τὸ γιγνόμενον τε καὶ ἀπολλύμενον*) is forgotten. Goodness of character when displayed in the forms of eminent self-sacrifice and devotion, as also the display of intellectual power, will sometimes affect us in a similar manner; but it is none the less true that for the soul in a healthy moral state, Beauty is the most efficient power for lifting it out of the realm of the temporary into that of the eternal. I say for the soul in a healthy state, for except when in the enjoyment of such a state, it is impossible for it truly to live in the regions of pure speculation, or to experience

the deep and lasting emotion which the contemplation of the Beautiful is capable of giving. This limitation is the expression of a truth which is too often neglected or forgotten, but which is nevertheless a truth of the highest importance; and the law laid down by Ruskin, which was so much questioned by some of his critics, that the production of any work of High Art implied a sound moral state in the producer, is verified by everyday's experience. It is a law which holds good alike in the case of the individual and of the nation. Great periods of national art-productiveness have been periods when the moral life of the nation was, as a whole, healthy and sound—when the spiritual life still triumphed over the sensual life. Take away this condition—let the sensual life triumph over the spiritual life, and instantly, as in the case of Greece, after the great age of her literature, productiveness is at an end. It was the same with the Italy of the Renaissance: the intellectual flame was extinguished by the voluptuous indulgence which reigned supreme in the early half of the sixteenth century. In England the fire of Genius slumbered under the gross vapours of the Restoration period, nor did it