

LAST LETTERS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649495238

Last Letters by Aubrey Beardsley

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

LAST LETTERS

LAST LETTERS
OF
AUBREY BEARDSLEY

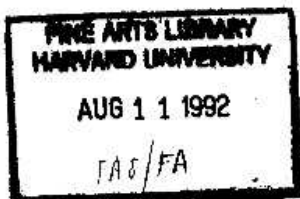
WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE
BY
THE REV. JOHN GRAY

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1904

All rights reserved

FA 5845.909.30



LAST LETTERS OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY

INTRODUCTION.

AUBREY BEARDSLEY, about whom much has been written since his death in the month of March, 1898, now speaks for himself. His work, and the appreciations of many of his literary and artist friends, present together a fairly complete picture of the man whose engaging figure was so familiar in London during a very few years. Of the work there remains probably nothing to be said. It is certain that his imaginative gifts never showed a sign of fatigue or exhaustion, and it is equally certain that artistically and intellectually he was very far from his maturity when death came. What that maturity would have produced is a speculation as idle as must be barren any attempts to determine the sources of his originality. He was utterly devoid of any malevolence towards his fellow-creatures, whether individually or collectively. He had in his nature a great possibility of affection, if personal timidity or sensitiveness balked its expression. Not even the sternest of his critics will deny his sincerity or his sobriety, but such an outspoken man as

he was with incorrigible youthfulness of spirit will sometimes shock the anxious, and arouse the suspicion that he is perpetrating a malicious mystification; but it is truer to say that Beardsley's chief preoccupation was to communicate in his drawings the surprise and delight which the visible world afforded himself.

In the midst of a brilliant career came the shock of a first hæmorrhage of the lungs, and the cloud began to gather which meant death in the end. None of his personal friends, I think, doubted of the lamentable issue from the first; but all agreed to practise, as friends do, the complacent hypocrisy of booying up the dejected spirit of the young man. The many delicately effaced themselves, and his intercourse with the world outside his family narrowed rapidly.

The letters now published become consecutive with this crisis of Beardsley's doomed life. Hitherto, where they are not merely formal, they are jejune and fitful, with some presage perhaps of the approaching collapse of health. What person with any experience of mortal sickness in men and women will not look a priori for a modification of character in this rare soul under the scourge of disease? The common case which bears a phenomenal aspect is that of a person by nature selfish who becomes considerate of others when the prop of life is struck at. Those whose lives happen to be passed

among the rougher sort see this pseudo-miracle in its strong contrasts. If one lives upon the very bedrock of primal human conditions, among rudimentary actions and passions, one finds the accretions of life to be either consonant with nobility, purity, self-sacrifice, or sordid and repulsive beyond description. Six months of sinking hope in life sometimes brings the two extremes into line. Sickness seems to do what nothing else could. What appears to the observer is the gradual humiliation of the physical economy being accompanied by the proportionate emancipation of the spiritual. It is a spectacle so moving, the reduction of a coarse brute to a frank-eyed youth, the renaissance of a gentle-souled factory-girl, supposed to have been long ago drowned in drink and gone for ever, from the wreck of a wild virago, that in presence of it the words tuberculosis, cancer, and even the euphemistic G. P., cease to curdle the blood.

Where the amenities of life are full and rich and varied, where a delicate and cultivated soul gives no outward indication that it is not tuned up to the pitch of which it is capable, the operation of the same principle may be deeply obscured, but one cannot suppose it to be entirely absent. Aubrey Beardsley might, had he lived, have risen, whether through his art or otherwise, spiritually, to a height from which he could command the horizon he was created to scan. As it was, the long