EMBRACING THE REALITIES.

TWILIGHT IN ITALY. By D. H. Lawrence. (B. W. Huebsch; $1.50.)

THE PRUSSIAN OFFICER. By D. H. Lawrence. (B. W. Huebsch; $1.50.)

When Mr. Lawrence takes the Realities in his avid, ample embrace the Reticences gasp and the Proprieties blushingly withdraw. For here is an author who does not call a spade an agricultural implement. He calls it a spade, and uses it as a spade. He digs with a determined relish in the good fat earth of human character and human experience; and if that earth happens to be the oozy muck of the barnyard, so much the better.

Viewed from another angle, Mr. Lawrence seems a modern haruspex busy with dogged insistence over the quivering entrails of the poor poultry of his day. He even suggests a medical student—one concerned, and over-concerned, with the odious remains of the dissecting-table. But his most taxing phase is that in which he strives to enter the secret place where seen and unseen, known and unknown, come together, and indulges in an intensive, horrific study of the nexus which unites flesh and spirit — busied with his Me and his Not-Me, his Self and his Selflessness. He probes insistently, incessantly, insidiously, into the hearts and souls (and bodies) of all alike—the British pit-hand, the German infantryman, the Italian peasant—ever intent on his great synthesis. He jangles confidently the Petrine keys; his it is, almost, to bind and to loose. The cosmos is a unit, perhaps—could we but unify it. One comes close to picturing an industrious hog, that roots in his lush pen and raises his muddy snout, now and then, toward the starry firmament. For the mud and the stars, with their respective implications, are but the two halves of one great Whole.

The stream of English life has moved on for centuries in a double flow; one current above the other, and the two have never quite blended. Hence, perhaps, the general immitigability of one's place in English society. The under stream may be called the Saxon. The Saxon nature inclines to deal with certain primal matters in a fashion that is blunt, dogged, earthy. A Havelock Ellis, an Edward Carpenter, may be restrained by certain philosophical and sociological considerations; but many recent English practitioners in verse and in semi-poetical prose are restrained only by artistic considerations—which, in these free days, may mean no considerations at all. It disconcerts and repels when an author, moved by a grim determination, opens up his people just as a cook's helper, armed with a knife, opens up his oysters. One begs for a little delicacy, a little reticence. One comes to feel like an intruder, an eavesdropper—as if in the thick of things to which one has no rightful access. Our author, apropos of a performance of Ibsen's "Ghosts" by Italian peasants, inveighs against the Scandinavians: "They seem to be fingering with the mind the secret places and sources of the blood": he finds them "impertinent, irreverent, nasty." And he goes on with some fine-drawn, but outspoken distinctions which forward his thesis and perhaps aid his own defence, but which give the modest reader a considerable measure of *malaise.*

Mr. Lawrence tells us that the Italians are over-sexed. So they are. Other authors have pointed out the fact, and have left it at that. But Mr. Lawrence does not leave it at that. He pursues his hapless Italian peasants of the Lake of Garda into church, into the theatre, into their little parties and gatherings, and drives the fact home with a hundred strokes. He does not spare them; he does not spare us; he does not spare himself. One finally feels some degree of disgust and is prompted to inquire: "Man, man! is the Italian the only one under the curse?"

In both these books all is surcharged, all is over-manipulated. Bits lovely in themselves become wearing by their thick-pressing mass. "The bluebells here were still wan and few." "The hazel spread glad little hands downward." "From under the twig-purple of the bushes swam the shadowed blue, as if the flowers lay in flood water over the wood-

land." As lovely as you like; each phrase shows the spare, sufficing touch of the poet. But it all runs on, intermittently, for page after page, and is rubbed in mercilessly as the set scene for a rustic (and inconclusive) triangle drama. Our author piles it up. He will take the kingdom of art by violence—by determination, perseverance, over-elaboration. The innocent English country-side becomes an oppressive jungle. "A Frenchman," we feel like saying, "would have done more with less—he would have known when to stop."

If a man is intense over his woodland flowers, will he be less intense with his human creatures? Hardly—as I have already hinted. Two instances: two privates in the German army—two victims, one need scarcely pause to say. One, ordered to climb a high ladder, knows that he is going to fall—and fall he does, in great anguish and to deep disaster. Well, the reader is in the poor lad's uniform, climbs with him, falls with him, suffers with him. The "tactile values" are triumphantly secured—but you feel strained to the snapping-point. A stronger case: that of the young orderly, who is maltreated by his captain, and who comes to feel that the score is to be settled only between the captain's throat and his own two strong hands. In the end the wretched fellow dies of rage, physical misery, mortification and (most of all) from sheer lack of power to coördinate the new floodtide of mental processes. We go through his ordeal with him and are almost as thoroughly done up as he. Mastery, of course—mastery, of a kind.

Mr. Lawrence's Germans do not altogether keep out of Italy. The Alps look down on Garda, and behind them crouches the mad creature that springs and rends. The military nature qualifies, even conditions, the chief of our author's "set pieces"—those resolute, emphatic philosophical passages which, here and there, he casually hangs upon pretty small pegs—or upon rows of them. A longish excerpt will serve to show his mind, trend of thought, style, and general nature. "Tiger, tiger, burning bright" is his text, and his discourse is on the supremacy of the flesh:

> Like the tiger in the night, I devour all flesh, I drink all blood, until this fuel blazes up in me to the consummate fire of the Infinite. In the ecstasy I am Infinite, I become again the great Whole. I am a flame of the One White Flame which is the Infinite, the Eternal, the Originator, the Creator, the Everlasting God. In the sensual ecstasy, having drank all blood and devoured all flesh, I am become again the eternal Fire, I am infinite.
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> This is the way of the tiger. . . This is the spirit of the soldier. He, too, walks with his consciousness concentrated at the base of the spine, his mind subjugated, submerged. The will of the soldier is the will of the great cats, the will to ecstasy in destruction, in absorbing life into his own life . . . till the ecstasy burst into the white eternal flame, the Infinite, the Flame of the Infinite. Then he is satisfied, he has been consummated in the Infinite.
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> This is the true soldier, this is the immortal climax of the senses. This is the acme of the flesh, the one superb tiger who has devoured all living flesh, and who now paces backwards and forwards in the cage of its own infinite, glaring with blind, fierce, absorbed eyes at that which is nothingness to it.

Ah, the flesh! Even the carved wooden flesh on the crucifixes of the Bavarian highlands is given its gruesome charm.

"Twilight in Italy," as may be gathered from the above, is nothing if not aggressively stylistic. A passage in a different tone may be cited, with the caution that it is but one bit of design embedded in a much larger one:

> Just below me I saw two monks walking in their garden between the naked, bony vines, walking in their wintry garden of bony vines and olive trees, their brown cassocks passing between the brown vine-stocks, their heads bare to the sunshine, sometimes a glint of light as their feet strode from under their skirts. . . . They marched with the peculiar march of monks, a long, loping stride, their heads together, their skirts swaying slowly, two brown monks with hidden hands, sliding under the bony vines and beside the cabbages, their heads always together in hidden converse. . . A partaker, . . I went with the long stride of their skirted feet, that slid springless and noiseless from end to end of the garden, and back again. . . They did not touch each other, nor gesticulate as they walked. . . Almost like shadow-creatures ventured out of their cold, obscure element, they went backwards and forwards in their wintry garden. . .

And so on. The two monks were not pacing off polyphonic prose. They were walking examples of neutrality. "The flesh neutralizing the spirit, the spirit neutralizing the flesh, the law of the average asserted, this was the monks as they paced backward and forward."

Peace to the garden. Peace to the monks. Most of all, peace (in due season) to him who watched them.

It should be said finally, for the sake of clearness, that the volume of short-stories entitled, none too judiciously, "The Prussian Officer," is made up largely of pictures of life among the English colliers—the same field and types that became known through Mr. Lawrence's novel, "Sons and Lovers." Several of these pieces are sketchy and seem to be juvenilia. "The Daughters of the Vicar" is the longest and perhaps the most meaty. "Odour of Chrysanthemums" provides the material for the last grim act of Mr. Lawrence's one play, "The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd."

HENRY B. FULLER.