

TORU DUTT- AS A POET

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Checked

THE ~~Woolf~~ Rambough family made a notable contribution to English verse. With Abu, and Toru Dutt we reach the first significant chapters of fulfilment in the history of Indo-English poetry. Both the precious sisters were gifted singers, but unfortunately, faded to die an early death, when they were still hardly more than girls. Toru died in 1877 at the age of 21. She was the "inheritor of unfulfilled renown", a poetess of rare promise and of no mean achievement. Her English rendering of French lyrics of the Romantic school came out in 1876 with the title "A Sheaf Gleaned in French fields". Toru was the main inspiration for others. Her work filled Edmund Gosse with "Surprise and almost rapture". Toru's "The Sheaf Gleaned in French fields" is a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness. [weakness] ~~over~~ overriding great obstacles and talent succumbing to ignorance. That it should be performed at all is so extra-ordinary, that we forget to be surprised at its inequality. The English verse is sometimes exquisite at other times, the rules of our prosody are ignored. It is obvious that the Hindi poetess is chanting to herself a music that is discord to an English ear.

The notes are no less curious, and to a stranger no less bewildering.

Nothing could be more naive than the writer's ignorance of some points or more startling than her learning in others. Tom's "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan" appeared posthumously. It more than proved her facility and power of poetic utterance in a foreign medium. The stories of Savitri and Sita, Dhruva and Prahlada, told so often before, are told again with a new freshness and charm. In these stories for the first time, she reveals to the west the soul of India, through the medium of English poetry. Perhaps, this is the chief reason why the "Ancient Ballads" deserves to live. For though they have faults enough, it is the first time that an Indian girl has enshrined the old stories in English verse.

The "Miscellaneous poems" at the end of the volume though few in number seem to us the best. Intensely personal, in them, Tom found her true sphere of expression. It is in these five or six poems in which Tom Dutt sings herself and her surroundings that she really reveals herself. Tom's

"Praugmaroo" gives very simple yet perfect description of an Indian garden. "Our Casuarina Tree" shows Toru's mastery over more elaborate verse-structure. Its simple yet elevated style recalls Wordsworth. She conjures up the picture of the tree with skillful touches -

"Like a huge python winding round and round
the rugged trunk extended deep with scars"

Of the fourth stanza of this poem we get a romantic, almost Keatsian touch -
"oh! I have heard that wait far, far away,
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay...."

Had Toru lived we may have hoped that she would have shed many of her early blemishes and risen to be a great poetess. More than ninety years have elapsed. Since Toru's poems were first given to the world & reviewers it is certain as H. A. L. Fisher declared that "Toru will ever remain in the great fellowship of English poets." Selma Gasse observed, "When the history of literature of our country comes to be written, there is sure to be a page in it, dedicated to this fragile exotic blossom of song".

THE END

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