

DERING CURTOIS.

An Appreciation.

THE Memorial Exhibition of her works, at the Forum Club, vividly brings to mind the artist herself. One can picture her working upon some of these very sketches, intent and wholly absorbed, taking her art seriously, as she had a right to do, because of her profound appreciation of the significance of art, and because she herself had produced works fraught with charm and significance. If she did not always achieve what she had in mind, she never ceased to strive after her ideal. "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" says Browning in *Andrea del Sarto*, and it may be that in the Elysian Fields, of which she so often spoke, Dering Curtois has already received in fuller measure the gift of artistic expression.

It is in her spontaneous, impressionistic sketches, one feels, that this artist best reveals herself—works inspired by her passionate love of nature. Her earlier works, some of which were hung at the Paris Salon and at the R.A., were more sustained and ambitious, but she was too various and complex a being to develop wholly in one direction. Doubtless she enjoyed life more than does a person of one idea, and she contributed not a little to the enjoyment of others. Art in every form appealed to her—music, drama and poetry. Sometimes she wrote quite charming verse, but it was the spoken, rather than the written word in which she excelled.

Both as a conversationalist and a speaker on semi-public occasions, Dering Curtois was always extraordinarily interesting, and sometimes brilliant. Moreover, nature had given her a beautiful voice, and even a certain difficulty in pronouncing the letter *r* added to the charm of her speech. She shone in debate, swiftly finding the weak points in her adversary's armour, and her blue eyes gleamed with mischievous delight as she put forth all her guile and force to vanquish an opponent. Far from evading such encounters in daily life she enjoyed them, and an excellent memory stood her in good stead.

That love of nature which sometimes gained for her the name of a 'nature worshipper' made the artist forgetful of her advancing years, as she worked in all weathers: this disregard of risk, unhappily, contributing to her final illness in October last. Only last spring she sketched at Kew Gardens in falling rain, and evening after evening worked on Chelsea Embankment, enchanted alike by the spring flowers and by the river in moonlight.

"Did you intend the bluebells to look like fairies?" asked the present writer—with regard to a sketch in the exhibition now on view. "I always *see* them like that," was the reply, and glancing

at her face, one realised that the almost childlike remark was made in all sincerity. A certain simplicity in her nature—a simplicity which often belongs to the true artist—contrasted with her astute and experienced judgment in everyday matters. She knew the world, and never expected too much from human nature, and she could be amazingly practical on occasion, though she loved to wander in tortuous paths of the mystic and occult. In that she never lost a sense of spiritual values she herself was a mystic, who ardently desired union with the Unseen.

Generous to a fault, Dering Curtois was always ready to relieve the distress of others, in a practical manner, so far as her means would allow. Life would have lost much of its value for her had she denied herself these spontaneous actions. Fully realising the inequalities and the apparent injustices of life, she also realised the irony of offering a stone to those in need of bread. She understood everyday, commonplace people, whether rustic or urban, and they appreciated the fundamental kindness in her.

In writing thus briefly of some of her characteristics, one can only attempt in word just such an impressionistic sketch as she herself loved to put down in paint. If this little sketch should recall the familiar personality to some who cared for her, it will have amply served its purpose. On the other hand, it may truly be said that no words are needed to recall those who have lived most vividly for us.

One word more; that of satisfaction that in holding an exhibition of her works at the Forum Club, her friends have paid their tribute to one who found so much of interest within its walls, and in turn gave the Club her willing allegiance and service. She was frequently to be seen there last September, before she returned to Little Missenden, and contracted the illness which ended fatally on October 6th. It was a courageous life, ended in peace and faith, and with happy memories of the summer spent in Lincolnshire and Cornwall, and at Glastonbury—the place which she found so inspiring. If one sought for an epitaph for this friend who was so rich in friendships, none more fitting could be found than the familiar lines from Stevenson's "Requiem":

"Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will."

J. Q.

FORUM CLUB.

December, 1928.