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Voir la transcription de ce fichier

The author came to England for the first time on a visit in 1881, and her remarkable conversational gifts and caustic power of repartee made her welcome in circles where she could hold her own with such a master of good talk as Whistler. Three years later aesthetic society found themselves not very kindly caricatured under thin disguises in "Miss Brown," Vernon Lee's first effort in fiction, now for long out of print and almost forgotten, but for the student of the artistic society of that day not unworthy to be remembered with *Futurist*. The book was much resented by some of her friends, but she could afford to be indifferent, as she remained throughout her life, to what people might think or say about her. The same year in which "Miss Brown" appeared "Euphorion" was published, described as "Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance," and dedicated to Pater. Though striking less new ground than "Eighteenth Century Studies in Italy," it contains some of Vernon Lee's best work and will survive when much of her later books will be forgotten. Shortly afterwards appeared "The Countess of Albany" in Allen's "Eminent Women Series," a sympathetic, though critical, study of the life of the salubrious wife of the Young Pretender and her lover, Allan. She herself described this book as a sort of sequel to "Eighteenth Century Studies," and the picture of society in Italy that it contains is just as brilliant and, as it deals more with individuals, more definite.

Vernon Lee's later work is of less value. Over 30 volumes of criticism, fiction, and essays stand to her credit, most of which are redolent of the colour and sentiment of Italy, and all of which reveal a mind steeped in the learning of the past and the beauty of the present. "Renaissance Fancies and Studies," "Genius Loci," "The Enchanted Woods," "Limbo and Other Essays," "The Spirit of Rome" (which captures its very breath), among her volumes of essays and travel scenes, and "Mauritius" and "Vantasia" among her volumes of stories, have long been familiar to most lovers of literature, and the exquisite little play *Ariadne in Mantua* and some of her less attractive pseudo-political and sociological writings, such as "Gospels of Anarchy" and "Satan the Waster," reveal her versatility of mind.

In 1924 she contributed to *The Times* a long letter, suggested by a criticism of Mr. Walsley's, on the vital tempo of the artist. "The Golden Keys," which came out in 1925, contained admirable studies of the *genius loci*. In 1932 appeared "Music and its Lovers," an empirical study of emotion and the imaginative responses to music. Last spring she was able to be present at a performance in Florence of the Italian version of *Ariadne in Mantua*, which obtained great success, and she was honoured enthusiastically by her many Florentine admirers.

During the Italian-Turkish War she gave herself very unreservedly to the cause and openly expressed sympathy with the Turks; and during the Great War, at the outbreak of which she was in England, she estranged most of her friends by writing articles against this country in the *American Press*, as a result of which she was refused a passport by the authorities. She was a prominent member of the Union of Democratic Control, and was the author of more than one of their polemical pamphlets. It must be remembered that nationality, and in consequence patriotism, were completely outside her understanding. Asiatic France is usually credited with having drawn the character of "Miss Bell" in "Le Lys Rouge" from Vernon Lee, but it is more likely a combination of her personality with that of another lady well known in England and France who was at one time an intimate friend of hers. She is mentioned by name in Browning's "Asolando."

"No, the book 'Which noticed how the wall-growth wave,' said she, 'Was not by Ruskin.' I said, 'Vernon Lee?'"

The close of her long literary career breaks a link with an age that now seems a long way off, and her death removes a unique figure from the world of letters.

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