

# A POET FULLY GARBED.

DAVID ROSS' "AFTERGLOW."

By S. E. GREVILLE-SMITH.

**T**O the living who love, and the dead who loved and who died, these songs of love, of life, and of death are dedicated." So runs the inscription on the first page of a volume of verse which the author, Mr. D. M. Ross, has called "The Afterglow." This title is in some senses a misnomer, but the words of the dedication express with the force of an epigram the "message"—if I may safely use a term so often misused—of the book. From beginning to end the theme is love—love, in all its myriad manifestations; love, in its rich and bewildering variety. And whether in its wildest, stormiest, most tender, most pathetic or most reverential mood, it is clad in burning words, that move—sometimes as if by pure instinct—to almost perfect music. "Almost," because here and there a flat note is struck, just as more than once or twice there is incoherency, or apparent incoherency, in the language; but these are accidents, and arise from no weakness of ear or of eye. Also they are independent of several obvious mistakes of the printer.

Before attempting an estimate of the value of the poetry, it is necessary that the limitations which the poet has set himself, or which have been fixed for him, should be acknowledged and understood. Mr. Ross plays upon a harp of divers tones, and he uses every note, but the changes, as I have said, are merely variations of one theme. Most of the poems are, frankly,

love songs, but even where the express image is not linked definitely to the sensation of the sweetest and only endurable passion, there is an undercurrent of feeling that is indissolubly interwoven with it. In the descriptions of the natural beauties of the universe, or of the rapture of bird song, or in praises of heroism, the all-pervading theme is obvious, though not ostentatiously present. Even in the didactic pieces, which are to me the least interesting, there is the same insistent demand that the first place everywhere and in everything belongs to love. The whole embodies a wonderfully sustained note, so long sustained, indeed, that to minds not attuned it must appear monotonous. This is inevitable. But no poet that ever was will stand reading like a novelist. Certainly not Mr. Ross. Poetry, at its worst, aims at compression of thought and beauty of expression; at its best, of course, it is the ultimate achievement in both directions. It is obvious, therefore, that he who runs may not read poetry with the certainty of understanding, much less enjoying it. Poetry demands insight. However perspicuous the maker, who is also the interpreter, the transmitter of the poetic idea, the receiver must possess not only perspicacity, but absolute sympathy. The poems of "The Afterglow" are mainly introspective, and the thoughts are not always readily communicable without the exercise of a little patience, in some cases not without a measure of indulgence. But the labour