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Minor Verse.

The Soul of Osiris. By Aleister Crowley. (Kegan Paul, 5s. net.)

Many swallows do not make a nightingale; but weather for swallows is weather for nightingales. So, when minor poets are in season, we may hope an occasional major one. (We use the term "minor poet" in the sense given it by modern journalism, though with protest that the title borne by Crashaw, Vaughan, Collins and Gray should be put to such unworthy use.) Nor is the minor poet without his own value. We have heard of Single-speech Hamilton—who made several speeches. But the minor poet often does flower capriciously in one or more poems unforgettable, or which deserve not to be forgotten: Wolfe's "Burial of Moore" is the best-known example. Unfortunately, he usually lives on that success, writing reams of unnoticeable poems on the strength of it. One would like a legal enactment for muzzling all such poets once they had fulfilled their natural function. But it is impossible to resist the plea that they might do it again; though you know they will not, any more than a man can regain the pleasant climax of intoxication by persevering drinks. Their repeated indulgence in "blushful Hippocrene" has much the same steadily deteriorating effect. But, though long experience plentifully chastens any over-sanguine expectation, we always approach a fresh "catch" of minor verse with the hope that it may contain at least one specimen of fortuitous and fortunate perfection.

We can hardly say that such hope is fulfilled by the array of volumes before us. Yet we are far from disappointment. For at least one writer shows a promise, in certain qualities, above any recent poets we have seen. Mr. Crowley, in his *Soul of Osiris*, has what hardly any of them have—a forceful, if narrow, inspiration, both in respect of imagination and emotional power. It is forceful rather than forcible, influent rather than affluent; not broad and opulent, but straight and intense. It is a geyser rather than an ample and irresistible river. For he is, alas! often tense instead of intense, and always more or less troubled by violence; but it is, on the whole, not the violence of weakness, but of somewhat anarchic strength. There is no necessity

that this Nazarene should be shorn, but he would be the better for having his hair combed. For (dropping all metaphor), apart from his violences, Mr. Crowley has defective technique. Strange as it appears in one with such evident force and glow, it would seem as if "the sweet trouble" of the poet were too often a burden of spirit to him and the bands of rhyme too strong for him. Those flowery shackles clearly cuts into the flesh of his expression in more than one place. Thus—

A mystic mortal and a maid,
Filled with all things to fill the same.

shows an awkwardness of diction which can only be explained by the supposition that he found it uneasy to fill up the rhyme to "name" and "flame." Another instance of poor technique follows directly after:

To overflow the shores of God,
Mingling our proper period.

Few will discern at first sight that the sense of the last line is—"Confusing our natural limits." The obscurity is caused by the ungrammatical use of "mingling" with a singular noun. We do, indeed, say "he has mixed the idea," or, "he has mixed the whole business." But these are sufficiently loose colloquialisms and should have no place in literature. Moreover, in the second case, "business" is regarded as a collective noun. "Period" here is not. We might point, also, had we space, to cases of grammatical ambiguity, which would be easily neglected in an easy poem, but in abstruse poetry (like Mr. Crowley's) are swiftly resented by the strained attention. And the reader does well to be angry. A broken round in the ladder makes small odds when we are mounting the garden wall: it is quite another thing in the rope ladder whereby we are sealing a precipice. The harder the theme the more severely should a poet close up every rivet in the expression. But from this same poem ("As-model") may be quoted stanzas showing Mr. Crowley at his best. It describes a dream-woman, the woman of his "star":

Only to me looks out for ever
From her cold eyes a fire like death;
Only to me her breasts can never
Lose the red brand that quickeneth;
Only to me her eyelids sever

And lips respire her equal breath;
Still in the unknown star I see
The very god that is of me.

The day's pale countenance is lifted,
The rude sun's forehead he uncovers;
No soft delicious clouds have drifted,
No wing of midnight's bird that hovers;
Yet still the hard blind blue is rifted,
And still my star and I as lovers
Yearn to each other through the sky
With eyes half closed in ecstasy.

But the poem, like all the poems, must be read entire to appreciate it. It will be obvious, even from this specimen, that they are mystical and therefore difficult. Strength and emotional intensity are what distinguish Mr. Crowley from a score of others with far greater gift of technique. They are what excuse—and cause—much that needs excuse. They are what would bring him to a prominent place among later poets when he has learned to possess instead of being possessed by them, and to muster technique, instead of suffering his inspiration violently to break open the gates of speech.