

THE NATION
22 AUGUST 1901

RECENT VERSE.

This is one way into Dreamland. Aleister Crowley, in "The Soul of Osiris" (London: Kegan Paul), reveals what seems to him an even more excellent way. He calls his volume with its four books "a History"—the history, evidently, of a very modern spirit as it has passed from the rule of the bodily senses and Baudelaire to the most exalted moods of mysticism. "Man's approach to God is regulated by the strictest laws, and follows a true mathematical curve"—these words from Mr. Thorold Roger's Introduction to the 'Dialogue of St. Catherine' might well serve as a motto for "The Soul of Osiris;" and the rationale of the transformation might be summed up in these other words of Mr. Rodgers:

The desire for ecstasy is at the very root and heart of our nature. Human life is informed at every stage by this desire for ecstasy, of self-escape into something higher. Mysticism alone affords to those favored beings who are competent in brain and will for its ardors a true and lasting realization of this desire. Neither the sensual nor the sentimental life can do so, for nature or society constantly throws us by illnesses or laws on the hither or farther side of its perfect realization.

"The Soul of Osiris" begins with a prologue, "Obsession," addressed to Charles Baudelaire. Book I., "The Court of the Profane," is given over to more or less symbolic portrayal of a life of surrender to the senses. Book II., "The Gateway of the Sanctuary," portrays the struggle between the senses and the spirit. Book III., "The Holy Place," describes the soul's earliest moments of triumph. Book IV., "The Holy of Holies," is the imaginative record of typical phases of mystical ecstasy. The depth and volume and the passionate intensity of the feeling in many of these poems are unmistakable, as are also the frequent richness and visionary splendor of the imagery and the aptness and transfiguring of the rhythms. But equally clear is the fact that the usual faults of the mystical imagination are already hurting the poet's work. We all know what happened to the transcendently beautiful lyrical genius of Blake. Aleister Crowley should keep a copy of the "Prophetic Books" next to the whipcord scourge in his anchorites cell. Already the world

he bodies forth in his verse is too often merely a clotted mass of willful emotional symbols.

That this need not be so, such stanzas as the following from "Jezebel" prove beyond cavil:

"A lion's mane, a leopard's skin
Across my dusty shoulders thrown:
A swart, fierce face, with eyes where sin
Lurks like a serpent by a stone.
A man driven forth by lust to seek
Rest from himself on Carmel's peak.

"A prophet with wild hair behind,
Streaming in fiery clusters! Yea,
Tangled with vehemence of the wind,
And knotted with the tears that slay;
And all my face parched up and dried,
And all my body crucified.

"Ofttimes the Spirit of the Lord
Descends and roods me with his breath
My words are fashioned as a sword,
My voice is like the voice of death.
The thunder of the Spirit's wings
Brings terror to the hearts of kings."

This is plastic enough, and so is the entire long narrative poem of which it is a part—plastic and immensely dramatic. Other poems show the same qualities. Of the mystical ardor that finds often beautiful are often wearisomely vague and wordy expression in the later poems, the following stanzas may stand as representative:

"O guardian of the pallid hours of night!
O tireless watcher of the smitten noon!
O sworded with the majesty of light.
O girded with the glory of the moon!
Angel of absolute splendor! Link of mine
Old weary spirit with the All-Divine!

"Ship that shalt carry me by many winds
Driven on the limitless ocean! Mighty sword
By which I force that barrier of the mind's
Miscomprehension of its own true lord!

Listen and answer, and behold my brow
Fiery with hope! Bend down and touch it now!

“Press the twin dawn of thy desirous lips
In the swart masses of my hair: bent close
And shroud all earth in masterless eclipse,
While my heart’s murmur through the being flows,
To carry up the prayer, as incense teems
Skyward, to those immeasurable streams!”

No one who reads such poems as these, and in addition the strangely visionary “Nameless Quest,” the sonnet to Allan MacGregor” and “The Rosicrucian,” can doubt that this poet is authentic and will reveal to the world much new beauty