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Reviews. Garter and Star.

The Star in the West. A Critical Essay upon the Works of Aleister Crowley. By Capt. J.F.C. Fuller. (Walter Scott. 6s. net.)

What is this wonderful abstraction we call the British public? Before Mafeking night we knew quite well what it was. The female part of it was Mrs. Grundy, the well-known old lady in white cotton stockings, elastic-side boots, stuffy petticoats, and a grim determination to give everyone a bit of her mind. The male part of it was an idealistic old gentleman of prolific habits with a pathetic faith in the British constitution and a habit of locking up the house at ten o'clock every weekday and at half-past nine on Sunday. This British Androgyne has vanished, and we are ruled instead by a protean monster whom we worship under the name of Public Opinion. Every class has its own opinion, for are we not a free country? London has its "Lisa of Lambeth" set, its Marie Corelli set, its Arthur Wing Pinero set, its George Bernard Shaw set, its Sir William Crooks set, its Royal smart set, its Lord Kelvin set, its individual pleasure seekers, its perverts, its literary, artistic, religious, and philosophical specialists. It is a hydra-headed monster, this London Opinion, but we should not be at all surprised to see an almost unparalleled event, namely, everyone of those hydra-heads moving with a single purpose and that the denunciation of Mr. Aleister Crowley and all his works.

Now this would be a remarkable achievement for a young gentleman who only left Cambridge quite a few years ago. It requires a certain amount of serious purpose to stir Public Opinion into active opposition, and the only question is, has Mr. Crowley a serious purpose? Our first instinctive feeling is that "It is damned clever, but it won't do." That is succeeded by the certainty that "It is raving madness"; and a final judgment that the young man is a remarkable product of an unremarkable age. The writing is not sane; but we have long ago outworn the illusion that sanity is a symptom of cleverness. Still, the writer has the serious fault common to Browning and Shaw: he

is incapable of a clear, straightforward statement. We have all met the old lady who, in trying to recount some personal adventures, wanders off into the biographies of everyone mentioned, and eventually forgets to tell us the point of her story. We suffer from this in Mr. Shaw's plays and in Browning's "Sordello." Are we willing to suffer from it in order to discover the secret of Mr. Crowley's mind? Is the game worth the candle? The time of year being August and the weather inclement, we are inclined to think it possibly may be. Now is the appointed season, so let us hasten to study the world of Mr. Crowley before the rush of our own lives reabsorbs us.

Our principle objection to Mr. Crowley's style is that it is redundant. For instance, the organs of generation are always cropping up in unexpected places, such as in Mr. Crowley's brain—which is said to be pregnant—and in Rosa Mundi's heart—which contains a symbol sadly out of place anatomically. All this reminds us of the ways of little boys; but surely Mr. Crowley might suppress these symptoms of the extreme youth of the virile spirit, and discipline his imagination with a study of the separate functions of the separate organs of the body. We are quite aware that the old fallacy that sex is the source of all the passion of the human race supports Mr. Crowley and his laudatory critic Captain Fuller in their tendency to use sexual imagery in excess; but surely the fallacy has been exploded. We have all read Weininger, who demonstrates that a large proportion of the human race have no special sex characteristics; that the absolutely female woman or virile man can hardly be said to exist at all; but that the border line between the physiological symptoms of sex is becoming less marked in each generation. There is a force of dominance universally manifest, but that force is exercised by every living creature; it impregnates the kingdoms of the sea and land and air; and sex is only a small part of its purpose. However Mr. Crowley has chosen to focus his attention on sex, and Captain Fuller has dutifully followed him in 144 pages. On the whole, we think Mr. Crowley may be congratulated. He manages to describe the utmost excess of desire when a rejected lover possesses and finally devours the dead body of his beloved, in terms which do not shock us in English any more than such descriptions usually shock us in French. This is a very exceptional accomplishment, as anyone may realise who had read French novels in English.

Here is one of Mr. Crowley's typical climaxes:—

The host is lifted up. Behold
The vintage spilt, the broken bread!

I feast upon the cruel cold
Pale body that was ripe and red.
Only her head, her palms, her feet,
I kissed all night, and did not eat.

"But had it not been for the garter, I might never have seen the star," Mr. Crowley says. Hence we look from the garter to the more starry part of Mr. Crowley's work, for he has learned a good deal about Eastern philosophy at first hand, which is well worth consideration. Captain Fuller describes "Crowleyanity" as being "the conscious communion with God on the part of an Atheist, a transcending of reason by scepticism of the instrument, and the limitation of scepticism by direct consciousness of the Absolute." He defines God later on as the Relation between man and the Absolute, and he says "it is the search after this relationship—God—that Crowley so frequently and ardently depicts." He cries in one place:—

"By the sun's heat, that brooks not his eclipse
And dissipates the welcome clouds of rain.
God! have Thou pity on this amazing pain."

And in another describes the mystic goal:—

"So shalt thou conquer space, and lastly climb
The walls of Time,
And by the golden path the great have trod
Reach up to God."

He grapples with the problems of human consciousness and has realised the absoluteness of zero. He perceives that when consciousness, as we know it, is absolutely indrawn, so that it exists in pure isolation, it knows as ecstasy which can only be expressed in the thought, "I do not exist." This last paradox of human manifestation has been perceived by every school of mystics. "Man's darkness is a leathern sheath, Myself the sun-bright sword," is the feeling of the consciousness as it returns to its human state, admirably expressed by Mr. Crowley in "Mysteries" (vol. i., p. 105). Finally he is driven to the utterance of one who has gained final liberation from human illusion:—

So lifts the agony of the world
From this my head that bowed awhile
Before the terror suddenly shown.
The nameless fear for self, far hurled

By death to dissolution vile,
Fades as the royal truth is known:
Though change and sorrow range and roll,
There is no self—there is no soul.

The essay on Science and Buddhism (p. 244 vol. ii. of *The Collected Works*) is valuable, proving as it does that Buddhistic philosophy is a logical development from observed facts. Captain Fuller declares that the Agnostic principles of "Crowleyanity" may be summed up as follows:—

"Believe nothing till you find it out for yourself."
"Say not 'I have a soul' before you feel that you have a soul."
"Say not 'There is a God' before you experience that there is a God."
"You can never understand till you have experienced."
"You can never experience till you get beyond reason."

In a word, his command to his followers is, Know or Doubt; do not believe. We are, he says, "surrounded with an appearance of Truth," and Reason is our guide. To become part of Wisdom we must leave Reason on one side. O doubt men differ in qualities, but these differences and progressive states have nothing to do with the sudden awakening of the faculty which lies beyond reason—that faculty of seeing clearly through the magical appearances surrounding us and perceiving the cause beyond the falsity of its effects. Mr. Crowley says, apropos of this, "It is no doubt more difficult to learn 'Paradise Lost' by heart than 'We are Seven'; but when you have done it you are no better at figure skating." He quotes as the great guiding scripture of his life a Buddhist Sutta (ii. 33):—"Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourself to no external refuge."

How is this inward mystery revealed? The answer is in the East by Yoga, and in the West by Magic; in the East by an entirely artificial and scientific method, in the West by a stimulation and sudden outflowing of the poetic faculty. The East, we may take it, is almost entirely static, whilst the West is wholly dynamic:—

Life flees
Down corridors of centuries
Pillar by pillar, and it is lost
Life after life in wild appeal

Cries to the master; he remains
And thinks not.

Bright Sun of Knowledge, in me rise,
Lead me to those exalted skies
To live and love and understand!
Paying no price, accepting nought—
The Giver and the Gift are one
With the Receiver.”

Such are some of the sensations described by Aleister Crowley in his quest for the discovery of his Relation with the Absolute. His power of expression is extraordinary; his kite flies, but he never fails to jerk it back to earth with some touch of ridicule or bathos which makes it still an open question whether he will excite that life-giving animosity on the part of Public Opinion which, as we have hinted, is only accorded to the most dangerous thinkers.

[Florence Farr.]