

**THE PRESS
NEW ZEALAND
17 DECEMBER 1910
(page 7)**

**THE BOOKFELLOW
By A. G. STEPHENS
(Specially Written for "The Press.")**

ALEISTER CROWLEY

"Ambergris, a Selection from the Poems of Aleister Crowley" (Elkin Mathews) is the most interesting volume of new English verse seen this year. Crowley was met years ago in the "English Critical Review," and has occurred here and there since, seeming always extraordinary. He is extraordinary—in his work, in the fine portrait prefixed to his work, and in his preface, which runs thus:—

"In response to a widely spread lack of interest in my writings, I have consented to publish a small and unrepresentative selection from the same. With characteristic cunning I have not included any poems published later than the Third Volume of my Collected Works.

"The selection has been made by a committee of seven competent persons, sitting separately. Only those poems have been included which obtained a majority vote.

"This volume, thus almost ostentatiously democratic, is therefore now submitted to the British public with the fullest confidence that it will be received with exactly the same amount of acclamation as that to which I have become accustomed."

The little volume of 200 pages is commended as a pleasure to every amateur of poetry in New Zealand. One does not remember any verse so plastic as some in the earlier pages of "Ambergris." Crowley writes shapes, beautiful shapes, beautiful coloured shapes like chryselephantine statuettes. Readers of verse know that there is ear-poetry and eye-poetry, poetry that sounds well and looks ill, and poetry that looks well and sounds ill. Crowley makes an unusual appeal both to eye and to ear. In particular, he has a gift of good beginnings, he attacks admirably:—

Rain, rain, in May. The river sadly flows. . .

Sing, happy nightingale, sing;
Past is the season of weeping. . .

In middle music of Apollo's corn
She stood, the reaper, challenging a kiss. . .

She fades as starlight on the stream,
As dewfall in the dell. . .

If form were all! Crowley fails in emotion. His verse does not yield that ecstasy that adds the last drop to the brimming vase. He is always evident, never ineffable. Nor, although original, is he highly, compellingly original; he does not lead us to unfooted fields of dream; at most he finds a new path in the familiar territory. Yet to call him "minor" is to do him injustice; he has the voice, though not the great imagination; and his skill with lines and rhymes, words and phrases, is more than craft.

Crowley has travelled, and writes harmonious stanzas for Hawaii, for Egypt, even for Hong-Kong. Perhaps after Verhaeren (for we catch an echo here and there) he cries:—

To sea! Before us leap the waves;
The wild white combers follow.
Invoke, ye melancholy slaves,
The morning of Apollo! . . .

The ship is trim; to sea! to sea!
Take life in either hand.
Crush out its wine for you and me,
And drink, and understand!

There are many Shakesperian touches in Crowley, and not so many Shakesperian lapses. If you stress the lapses, he gives a line for maltreating:

Smite! but I must sing on. . .

What a motto for our bards, ifay!

Accept Crowley or refuse him. He brings his own atmosphere, and captivates you, there is such a tide of life in him. And for closing, let the Star-Goddess sing a stanza of Orpheus dead—and risen:—

For brighter from age to age
The weary old world shall renew
It's life at the lips of the sage.
Its love at the lips of the dew.
With kisses and tears
The return of the years
Is sure as the starlight is true. . .

There is one that hath sought me and found me
In the heart of the sand and the snow;
He hath caught me, and held me, and bound me.
In the lands where no flower may grow,
His voice is a spell
Hath enchanted me well!
I am his, did I will it or no. . .