

**THE PALL MALL GAZETTE
LONDON, ENGLAND
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**Jephthah and Other Mysteries,
Lyrical and Dramatic**

By Aleister Crowley

(London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)

FULL OF SOUND AND FURY.

Mr. Crowley takes himself very seriously; he believes he has a mission, he thinks there is at least a probability that his poetry will make a stir in the world and among posterity. We wish we could think so too, because we might in that case hope for some little scrap of posthumous fame in return for having been one of the first to acclaim him; but we are compelled to forego this pleasant prospect, and to state our opinion that this poet's estimate of his own powers is not at all likely to be shared by a large number of his fellow men. We gather that Mr. Crowley is a young man; in his dedication he calls himself a boy; but as he had published three volumes of verse, has been to Cambridge, and has done some difficult Alpine climbing (three years ago), this must not, we suppose, be taken too literally. The signs of youth, however, are present throughout the volume. There is the customary homage to Mr. Swinburne, and (alas!) the usual failure to write in his manner without adopting his mannerisms. Mr. Crowley, in his dedicatory verses to thee other poet, addresses him as "Master," and expresses unbounded admiration for Mr. Swinburne's political poetry. He thinks that it did a great deal of good, and proposes to write something in the same style himself:—

Master, the sons of Freedom are but few—
Yea, but as strong as the storm-smitten sea,
Their forehead consecrated with the dew,
Their heart made mighty: let my voice decree,
My spirit lift their standard: clear and true
Bid my trump sound, "Let all the earth be free!"

—and so on. We do not know if Mr. Swinburne will comply with this request, but if he should do so he might take the opportunity to point out to his disciple that he should eschew what are known as “Cockney rhymes”—such as “dawn” and “sworn”—and also such unwelcome additions to our stock of verbs as “to lume” and “to pact.”

We do not wish to dwell unfavourably upon youthful affectations, such as the writing of *Kjöbnhavn* for Copenhagen, and the spelling of *cabalistical* with a q; but it is carrying imitation to an unpardonable length to introduce quotations from “The Garden of Proserpine” into a poem composed in the same metre. This shocking breach of literary etiquette would be enough to make us despair of Mr. Crowley’s chances of renown. But there are other reasons for adopting a pessimistic attitude in this respect. Modelling his work on Mr. Swinburne’s least admirable performances, he gives us a quantity of windy stuff about “the harpy brood of king and priest,” “the styes and kennels of priest and king,” and so forth. A person appears to have originated a phrase, inoffensive enough, as follows: “I am not a gentleman and I have no friends.” For some unexplained reason (presumably one of the “Mysteries,” of which the volume is said to be composed), Mr. Crowley is so furious with this individual that he positively foams at the mouth in two sonnets of frothy vituperation. The author of the phrase in question is “self-damned.” The sunshine is sickened with the leprous moisture of his veins. His haggard eyes are bleared with their own corrupting infamies. His lazar corpse will break the burning surface of the fiery lake in lava. The reader may think that this is enough, but Mr. Crowley’s quiver is by no means exhausted; his enemy has a carrion soul’ he is caressed by Hell’s worms; he is a coward, a liar, a monster, a goat, a swine, a snake. It is scarcely necessary for us to add that the sonnets are so bad that the person to whom they are addressed need not trouble himself to search for any rejoinder.

It is true that this farrago, of which Mr. Crowley should be heartily ashamed, is the worst thing in the volume. If Mr. Swinburne had never displayed violence in criticism, Mr. Crowley would doubtless have used more urbanity—which shows how careful our poets should be. But we would not hold them responsible for all the antics of their forcible-feeble imitators.

Mr. Crowley never gives us a chance (except, perhaps, in two very dreary “dramas” as to which we have nothing more to say) of judging him on his merits. In his “Valentine,” he appears to be writing in the character of the Gay Lord Quex, who, as we know, found a fair young English girl to be the inevitable

end of his career of conquests. Mr. Crowley assures the lady of his profound affection, but he cannot help informing her at the same time that he has been the devil of a fellow in his day—that he has “dallied in classic bowers,” and that—not to mince matters—his mouth “has clung to flame of hell.” To us the whole thing rings hollow, and the bard who hints thus of this past exploits with Eros and Aphrodite reminds us of the poor young men who stand on Delmonico’s doorstep in the evening with toothpicks in their mouths, striving to convey the impression that they have been feasting within. We would not have devoted so much space to Mr. Crowley had not some of the press criticisms on his previous publications, printed at the end of this volume, shown us that a certain number of our contemporaries were at one time disposed to encourage him to persist in his metrical exercises. Among the reviews, however, we find one (from the *Athenoeum*) which contains the following sentence: “We cannot say these verses deserve to be read;” and we think that the same dictum may very properly be applied to this volume of so-called Mysteries.