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A BIBLICAL DRAMA.

"Jephthah, and other Mysteries," lyrical and dramatic, by Aleister Crowley (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 7/6).

We confess to having experienced the utmost difficulty in determining the merit and meaning of Mr. Crowley's work. For the Jewish reader the chief point of interest in this voluminous collection of poems is the story of Jephthah, told in dramatic form, but we could not escape the dedication to Mr. Swinburne and the prelude. The author loves to riot in words, and whilst he sings easily enough, perplexes with his mysticism and "unseen worlds," which are as dense to him who evidently loves to ponder on occult sciences as to the average reader. A note which shows Mr. Crowley has been dipping into Caballa and has assimilated some Gnosticism is quite as unilluminative as the poem, for we are told that he endeavoured "to hint at the cloudy conflict of the mysterious forces that rule beyond our vision and our comprehension." He has not, as he has dared lifted the veil, and his obscurities tend to blind us to the better qualities of other parts of his poem.

With Jephthah we have to find this other fault, that it has interminable choruses, line upon line of Swinburnian song, and lavish rhyme which carry the story not a wit further, whilst in real dramatic power the play, is weak. Adulah, the Judge's daughter condemned by the cruel vow, proves a most indifferent character. The following, from a chorus of seven stanza of equal length, is characteristic of the author's unutterable mysticism.

Their songs, their purity, their peace,
Glide slowly in the arms of God,
His lips assume their sanctities.
His eyes perceive the period
Of woven webs of lutes at ease,
And measures by pure maidens trod,

Full like the smoke of mountains risen at dawn
The cloud veils of the air are withdrawn.

That Mr. Crowley can do better than this is proved in his descriptive writing. A messenger thus describes the Jewish situation ere the elders send for Jephthah

The tribe of Ephraim went forth to fight
Armed, and with bows, and turned them back today,
For in the south a cloud of many men,
And desert horsemen, fury as the sun,
Swarmed on the plains, a crescent from the hills
That girdle Mahaniam; and behold
Our men were hemmed before the city gates,
The elders having fortified them so
They fled about the city, and the horsemen
Dashing, destroyed them as the wind that sweeps
Sere leaves before its fury: then the city
With arrows darkened all the air; and luck
Smote down some few pursuing; but their captain,
Riding his horse against the gate, drove in
His spear, and cried to them that follow him:
Who pluck my spear out shall be chief of all
That ply the short spear: and who breaks the gate
Shall lead my horsemen into Mispah.

Mr. Crowley has many real poetic fancies, his talent is undeniable, but it is at present wholly misused in a vain quest after the incomprehensible.