

THE GLASGOW HERALD
GLASGOW, SCOTLAND
26 JUNE 1902
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NEW BOOKS OF THE WEEK.

POETRY, VERSE, AND DRAMA.

"Tannhäuser." A Story for All Time. By. Aleister Crowley. (London: Kegan Paul & Co.)

Those who have read some of Mr. Crowley's works will not be surprised that he should have taken up the subject of Tannhäuser. As in the case of Wagner, before him it lay directly in his way, and he was bound to tackle it, and present his own version or interpretation of the old German legend. It furnished him with an opportunity of giving expression to certain cryptic religious ideas with which he seems perpetually haunted. He calls his play a story for all time. In a sense that is not untrue. It is a story that is daily being evolved in this common world. It is the story of a man who is caught or allows himself to be caught in the toils of passion, and is as nearly as possible eternally ruined, but who escapes through some happy flash which reveals the horror of his degradation in contrast with the beauty and glory of the religious ideal. Readers of Mr. Crowley should never neglect his introductory matter, which is always interesting, especially when he acts as his own interpreter. In the preface to his present work he explains:—"It may help some of my readers if I say that my Tannhäuser is nearly identical in scheme with the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' " Yea, but with a considerable difference in the treatment. With reference to one particular character who appears at the contest of the minstrels, he says, "It will be sufficient if I state the 'The Unknown,' whether minstrel, or pilgrim, or Egyptian sage, represents Tannhäuser in his true self—the 'Only Being in an Abyss of Light.' " The Tannhäuser who talks is the "Only Being in an Abyss of Darkness," the natural man ignorant of his "identity with the Supreme Being." The various other characters, he says, "are little parts of Tannhäuser's own consciousness and not real persons at all: whether good or bad, all alike hinder and help (and there is not one whose function is not thus dou-

bled) the realization of his true unity with all life." As applied this would mean that every man, good or bad, is a small part in every thinking man's consciousness, and hinders or helps the realization of his true unity with all life in the human drama. There is no doubt truth in the idea, though it may not be generally acceptable. It recalls in a sense Emerson's little poem of "Brahma," in which occurs the line "I am the doubter and the doubt;" and why should not the same spirit say, "I am the sinner and the saint." Tannhäuser all the time he is enjoying the pernicious luxury of the Venusburg is perpetually haunted by Celestial dreams and visions. The dream of his early love saves him. But in the competition of the Minstrels in the Palace of the Landgrave his song is so complete and honest that it wrecks his chance of union with Elizabeth. His visit to Rome to seek absolution from the Pope is a failure and a success. His Holiness plays the fool, and his own staff bears witness against his lack of charity. But there is no need to repeat the story. Mr. Crowley's version of the story is serviceable enough. It is told with variations, no doubt, but with wonderful eloquence and with the inevitable flavouring of Egyptian symbolism.