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Review of AHAB and Other Poems

Mr Aleister Crowley's previous work has been eccentric, and at the best he has done more to provoke curiosity than to give confidence. Now he chooses to handicap himself by printing poems in a type that must inevitably impose restrictions upon many readers, and we think that the diction, usually admirably simple, of the principal piece in "Ahab and Other Poems" (Chiswick Press, pp. 34, 5s. net) suffers from any interruption of the fluency of its rhythms. Mr Crowley has amplified the Biblical narrative, and, with an obvious revolt of sympathy, has given to the savage figure of Ahab something of the nobility of reason that rebels against the tyranny of his fate. There is a modern self-consciousness in this tragic, brooding monologue—

I see him, a fantastic ghost,
The vineyard smiling white and plain,
And hiding ever innermost
The little shadows on his brain;
I laugh again with mirthless glee,
As knowing also I am he.

A fool in gorgeous attire!
An ox decked bravely for his doom!
So step I to the great desire.
Sweet winds upon the gathering gloom
Bend like a mother, as I go,
Foreknowing, to my overthrow.

Mr Crowley has some doubtful phrases, but most of his verse is clear and moderate. Here is his picture of Naboth:—

The beast. A gray deceitful man,
With twisted mouth the beard would hide,
Evil yet strong; the scurrile clan
Exaggerate for its greed and pride,
The scum of Israel! At one look
I read my foe as in a book.

The beast. He groveled in the dust.
I heard the teeth grind as he bowed
His forehead to the earth. Still just,
Still patient, passionless, and proud,
I ruled my heavy wrath. I passed
That hidden insult, spake at last.

The other pieces include a grandiose sonnet on Rodin's statue of Balzac; "Melusine," in which mannerisms and affectations predominate; and "The Dream," a smooth piece of verse that leaves no very strong impression. There are an introduction and an epilogue in verse by Count Vladimir Svareff.