

Literary Guide and Rationalist Review
London, England
1 December 1904
(pages 188-189)

A Bewildering Poet

It is not easy to review Mr. Crowley. One of the most brilliant of contemporary writers, he surely bears the palm for eccentricity. In vigorous prejudice he rivals Mr. Swinburne. In obscurity of expression and abrupt transition from one idea to another he is a worthy disciple of Mr. Browning. The latter influence is probably as disastrous to the minor poet as that of Carlyle was to the ambitious prose writers of a bygone generation, and it is to be regretted that Mr. Crowley does not sedulously banish its traces from his verse and be content to rest on his own undoubted merits. It is not that this writer lacks individuality—of that quality he offers the most abundant evidence; but his mind appears to have an unduly close affinity to that which Mr. Browning we find least admirable. Mr. Crowley's short poems in particular reveal the possession of a beautiful and genuine vein of poetry, which, like the precious metals, is at times scarcely discernible among the rugged quartz in which it is embedded. With this true poetic feeling, allied to remarkable learning, and with a pretty wit of his own, Mr. Crowley is well-equipped for producing a work of permanent value. But his gifts are lavished with a hand so indiscriminate as frequently to make the judicious grieve. Good work is to be found in *The Sword of Song*, but there is even more which will arouse in the average reader (to whom, however, Mr. Crowley obviously does not appeal) no other feeling than one of sheer bewilderment. Sometimes an oasis of beauty will reveal the author's power to charm, the good-humoured egoism will tickle the fancy, the quaint allusiveness of his notes will raise the eyelid of wonder, while the crabbed involutions of style and the arrogant dogmatism will repel sympathy. Mr. Crowley's abilities deserve a more orderly and harmonious setting. As a specimen of his skill in rhyming we may mention that in one paragraph he manages to find syllables to rhyme with the names Euripides, Aristophanes, Æschylus, Sophocles, Aristobulos, and Alcibiades. We admire the cleverness of the feat, but the result is as far removed from poetry as a sack race is from ordinary running. With regard to

the prose portions of the volume, the essay on "Science and Buddhism" reveals some penetrating touches; but we have to confess that the discourse on "Ontology" baffles our comprehension. The poetical epilogue is beautiful and contenting. A word of praise is due for the handsome style in which the volume is produced.