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BOOKS OF THE DAY.

AN UNSUNG SINGER.

By J. E. Patterson.

THE STAR IN THE WEST: A Critical Essay upon the Works of Aleister Crowley, by Capt. J. F. C. Fuller, London, Walter Scott, 6s. net.

Here is a master-voice in song, and none the less masterly because of its being entirely unknown. At the fact of its masterliness some persons will cavil; others will doubt it, blaming me in their minds as an injudicious optimist who, in uncut stones, sees finished gems of finest brilliance. But these stones from the mine of true poetry are cut in a manner that says, Here is a hand which has "waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

A Crowded Shelf.

It has rarely fallen to the lot of a man—so far as my reading goes, it has not happened to one—to be the author of thirty-two books, ranging in prices from two guineas to half a crown each, and to have a book of 327 pages written anent his work, and still be an unknown voice in the land. In this fact alone there is a certain kind of distinction, the greatness that comes of being rare. Such is Mr. Aleister Crowley.

To some minds—aye, and to many—the finest poem is the simple lyric that haunts one's mind because of its humanness, its beauty, its sadness that is hardly sorrow, its poetry and a correct rhythm that at once makes it a song. We also know that to the majority of readers one of the first leaves in the poet's crown of laurel is given him not merely for teaching in song what he has learnt in suffering, but for turning his own sorrows into such songs that women and other men may read and think of them as the expression of their own sufferings. Here, then, is Mr. Crowley as the poet of love, so far as he may be seen in a few lines, taken from amongst hundreds of their kind:—

To know you love me; that your body leaps
With the quick passion of your soul; to know
Your fragrant kisses sting my spirit so;
To be one soul where Satan's smiles and sleeps:
Ah! In the very triumph-hour of Hell
Satan himself remembers whence he fell!

These lines are not flawless; yet it needs no adjectives as drums to sound their praises. The palate that cannot appreciate such a vintage to the full knows not the taste of good wine.

The Imperialism of Love.

In many lyrics and sonnets Mr. Crowley's dominant note is the very Imperialism, the Romanism of love; just as throughout the whole of his work there is the ringing note of mastery. But when he has seen the wisdom of not flinging splendid lines away on those subjects which wiser men remember only to themselves, when he has ceased to prefer the lurid and quickly evanescent gems of the refuse-heap of sensations for the enduring and unsurpassable beauty of the stars, then will he give us more and better even than—

Hush—the music swells space,
Rolls its silver billows up
Through the void demesne of space
To the heavens' azure cup!
Hush, my love, and Sleep shall sigh
"This is immortality."

Mr. Crowley writes much of womanhood and woman, but he omits that without which there can be neither of them; that is femininity. His women are men in women's clothes and places. He should take away some of their vigour, and in its stead give them grace, suppleness and the art of winning by seeming capitulation. Amongst his other moods and imitations, conscious or unconscious, Mr. Crowley has much of Heine, without the latter's petulance; his Heinesque moods are steeled through with a strong man's virility. But it is when we come to him in more abstract conditions of mind that we find him in a higher state. He says—

I have dreamed life a circle or a line,
Called God and Fate and Chance and Man divine.
I know not all I say, but through it all
Mark the dim hint of ultimate sunshine.

Nature's Call.

And how many others have said great things, yet knew not all they said! Was there ever a poetical would-be unraveller of that skein of mystery, wherein life and death and nature work together, who could explain half of what he said! No; because it was not he who said those things, but nature speaking through him. Yet, if Mr. Crowley does not understand all he says, he sees something that is of far greater importance to him, as shown here:

So I press on. Fresh strength from day to day
Girds up my loins and beckons me on high.
So I depart upon the desert way;
So I strive ever toward the copper sky,
With lips burnt black, and blind in either eye.
I move for ever to my mystic goal,
Where I may drain a fountain never dry;
And of Life's guerdon gather in the whole,
And on celestial manna satisfy my soul.

And fitly may that pronouncement be rounded off with these four lines as a message to all mankind—

So shalt thou conquer Space, and lastly climb
The walls of Time;
And, by the golden path the great have trod,
Reach up to God.

In spite of Mr. Crowley's disdain of correct metre and his occasional lapses in grammar, pages of praise could be written on his work, backed by quotations from it.