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BOOKS OF THE DAY.

"Ambergris." A selection from the poems of Aleister Crowley. Elkin Mathews. 3s. 6d. net.

Judging from the elaborate sarcasm of his preface to "Ambergris," Mr. Aleister Crowley would seem to be rather hurt in his mind that the British public should have mostly ignored his previously published writings. But Mr. Crowley is by no means the only contemporary poet who is well worth reading and is yet not read. It would, indeed, be rather surprising if Mr. Crowley's books had created much stir in the reading world. For one thing, he deals very largely in mystical and esoteric doctrines, of the kind likely to repel the majority of downright Englishmen as powerfully as they have attracted his few enthusiastic admirers. These doctrines, too, are often expressed symbolically figured by the great names of ancient religions. The average man does not much mind meeting with a miscellaneous host of heathen gods and demigods in poetry; but when he is forced to feel that these gods and demigods are all intensely alive in Mr. Crowley's mind, the focal points, as it were, of doctrines which Mr. Crowley passionately holds for eternal and almighty truths, then the average man is apt to sheer off from such poetry with dubious and rather scared looks. Nevertheless, in spite of this, Mr. Crowley's name, if only as a vague rumour, has become known to most of those who are looking for a great contemporary poet.

And now, for the better information of such people, we have a selection from his works (some of which are not very obtainable), presented in a shape by no means formidable to the lean purse; and the poorest poetry-lover can now find out what sort of a poet Mr. Aleister Crowley really is. He certainly is worth reading—not so much for the doctrines, some noble, some queer, which he inculcates, as for the poetry he sometimes manages to make out of them. The man who loves poetry wisely is willing to accept from a poet any creed or doctrine he likes to air, from the materialism of Lucretius to the mysticism of Blake, provided always that he makes poetry of it. Much of

Mr. Crowley's dogmatic poetry is mere mouthing, the primal obscurity of his theme still more darkened by studied eccentricity of image and extravagance of diction. The emulation of Swinburne's manner is at times too obvious to be satisfactory; and Shelley comes in for some sincere flattery. But there are poems in "Ambergris" which are all Mr. Crowley's own, fine poems in which (to quote from one of them),

There is music and terrible light
And the violent song of the seas;

intellectual passions wedded to melody that will not easily be forgotten. There are plenty of such pregnant sayings as this:

Mere love is as nought
To the love that is Thought,
And idea is more than event.

There are poems, such as "The Rosicrucian," which are daring experiments in philosophy and in psychological construction alike. This is a noble verse:

No man hath seen beneath my brows
Eternity's exultant house.
No man hath noted in my brain
The knowledge of my mystic spouse.
I watch the centuries wax and wane.

The descriptive poems, especially those descriptive of the tropics, are excellent of their kind; but the finest poem in the book is undoubtedly an "Invocation to Hectate." A large idea, rigorous verbal craftsmanship, and a spacious music, combine to make that one of the most notable magical poems ever written. Here is a snatch of it:

I shall consummate
The awful act of worship. O renowned
Fear upon earth, and fear in hell, and black
Fear in the sky beyond Fate!
I hear the whining of thy wolves! I hear
The howling of the hounds about thy form.
Who comest in the terror of thy storm,
And night falls faster, ere thine eyes appear
Glittering through the mist.