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Decadent Poetry

Many persons have wondered at the quaint heads, half human, half animal, which leer from the nooks and angles of Gothic cathedrals, and at the daring and irreverent spirit which seems to have animated the sculptors. These grinning monstrosities fitly symbolise the contents of Mr. Crowley's latest volume. But it is something more than the spirit of medievalism that he expresses. He is filled with the modern wonder at the marvellous, unintelligible world; the beauty, the mystery, the terror of life haunt and oppress him. He struggles against the horrors that attract him. He sings alike of the base and the beautiful, finding inspiration in the brutality of the flesh as easily as in the rapture of the soul, in the mockery of the real, and in the glory of the heavenly vision. "In these poems you shall hear the laughter of the gods and of the devils; understand their terrors and ecstasies; live in their heavens and hells." Readers who happen to be of a prudish turn should by all means avoid the poems of Mr. Crowley. One can picture Evangelical respectability recoiling from this little book with a horror surpassing that of the tramp condemned to a cold bath. The piety which thinks the mystery of existence explained by a copy-book precept will never understand a poet who probes the sores of the sinner with the callousness of a surgeon. Of ribaldry, wit, blasphemy, and indecency Mr. Crowley is usually lavish. He does not hesitate to write of things which Mrs. Grundy covers with a white sheet, and the strength and coarseness of his language are certainly appropriate to his subjects. It is true he dams uncleanness, though not without a certain smacking of the lips over its fascinations. Yet through all the poet's whimsicalities there gleam the rays of sweet and genuine poetry. His genius is unequal, rising easily to noble eloquence and descending with equal facility to the vulgar and the repulsive. Mediocrity is abhorrent to him; his rugged verse matches well the powerful and often profound daring of his thought. His knowledge of men, women, and things is "extensive and peculiar"; he writes strongly because he strongly feels. Mr. Crowley is

frankly pagan, and goes out of his way to harrow the susceptibilities of the poor pietist; the reader is alternately delighted and irritated by having to balance striking merits against defects which the author's genius makes gratuitous. We should be sorry to lose the strong individuality of Mr. Crowley's poems, but he would rise higher if he toned down the fleshly tints and fumigated the atmosphere of decadence with marks too many of his productions.