



## Review and Comment

EBONY AND CRYSTAL by CLARK ASHTON SMITH. (4to152pp. The Auburn Journal, Auburn, Calif., 1923.)

BETWEEN the urbane sterilities of our bearded Brahmins and the psycho-analytical clinics of our younger intellectuals, American poetry fares badly indeed; a condition expressed with melancholy force by George Sterling in his introduction to the third book of verse from Clark Ashton Smith. More truly sensitive to the wilder dreams of men, and more sublimely cosmic in his imaginative sweep of fancy's chartless chaos than any native versifier since Poe, Mr. Smith has remained in relative obscurity outside his Californian domain because of a public trained to distrust beauty and the adventure of the spirit.

"EBONY AND CRYSTAL" is an artist's intrepid repudiation of the world of trolleys and cash-registers, Freudian complexes and Binet-Simon tests, for realms of exalted and iridescent strangeness beyond space and time yet real as any reality because dreams have made them so. Mr. Smith has escaped the fetish of life and the world, and glimpsed the perverse, titanic beauty of death and the universe; taking infinity as his canvas and recording in awe the vagaries of suns and planets, gods and dæmons, and blind amorphous horrors that haunt gardens of polychrome fugi more

remote than Algol and Achernar. It is a cosmos of vivid flame and glacial abysses that he celebrates, and the colorful luxuriance with which he peoples it could be born from nothing less than sheer genius.

The summation of Mr. Smith's exotic vision is perhaps attained in the long phantasmal procession of blank verse pentameters entitled, "The Hashish-Eater; or, The Apocalypse of Evil." In this frenzied plunge through nameless gulfs of interstellar terror the Californian presents a narcotic pageant of poisonous vermilion and paralysing shadows whose content is equalled only by its verbal medium; a medium involving one of the most opulent and fastidiously choice vocabularies ever commanded by a writer of English.

Mr. Smith, born in 1893, was the author of an amazing volume at nineteen. He has kept faithful to the splendour that knows no shackles, and whether in his cosmic orgies or his simpler love-poems has always fulfilled the Cabellian aspiration—"to write perfectly of beautiful happenings."

H. P. L.

