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Hounding the King of the Devil Cults Around the Globe

Barred from England, Raided in Italy, the
"Beast 666" Bobs Up in Paris—and Gets
Yawns Where Once He Thrilled and Horrified

By Nigel Trask.



Crowley, the Purple Priest, as he looks today in Paris.
Compare with the photo life-cycle of Crowley at left.

Paris.

Aleister Crowley is back again, a fatter, balder, older, sadder but apparently no wiser man. This high priest of dark devil cults, once hated and feared by Parisians, he who mysteriously disappeared from London and hounded from Sicily, returns to the boulevards like a figure from his own fantastic pages on black magic. Thereby hangs an amazing tale.

Last year they said Crowley was dead, murdered by other demonologists in the high places of ancient Thibet. Now the Parisians assert he sent out this story himself to protect himself from his sworn enemies.

If that is true, Crowley might have saved himself the trouble. The most tragic thing that could happen to "the Beast of the Apocalypse" has happened—he has become old-fashioned, he is no longer feared, he is considered just a mild, harmless, slightly eccentric, elderly Englishman, not rich and not at all terrifying.

The celebrated "basilisk stare" that made scores of women his "love slaves" doesn't seem to work any more, the mumbo-jumbo of his paganistic rituals calls forth laughter.

The other day I talked to a charming blonde, blue-eyed American flapper, aged 22, who had met Crowley at the Cafe du Dome the day before. She could hardly describe the incident for pent-up giggles.

"Of course I have heard of Aleister Crowley," began Miss 1928. "Mamma used to know him, and every time she mentioned him she used to shudder. He was so dark, dangerous and handsome, and he had those hypnotic eyes. He was so mysterious, daring and evil. Of course I wanted to meet him.

"Well, it happened, and he was a shock, but not in the way he expected to be. He grabbed my hand, just like any Yale man on his best night club behavior, but with a difference in results, drew me over to him, and began to yodel sotto voce: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law!'

"Can you imagine! O learned afterward that that is always his opening line. It's part of his funny pagan ritual. Then he began working his eyebrows fast, just like old Svengali himself. I'm telling you, that may have got results in the naughty nineties, but it seemed just a wee bit ham to me.

"Then he told me that I was Nuit, his lady of the starry heavens, that I should take my fill of love, that my ecstasy was his, and his joy was to see my joy. I was simply aghast, but I let him carry on just for the fun of the thing. Then when he came up for air I answered.

" 'Listen,' I said, 'you ought to see Jung. He does a lot for cases like you. You have a Messianic complex because you were dropped in a pulpit as a child, or something. Any behaviorist could tell at a glance you haven't been properly conditioned. Your reactions are dated, and your manifestations of ego show a desire to escape from actualities. Besides, your chemistry is different from mine. I don't like you.' "

I really think that pretty Miss 1928 is a little hard on the famous Aleister Crowley. I have known him for years, and have often found him a delightful companion. He is a man of tremendous energy, mountain climber, explorer, novelist, pain-

ter as well as King of the Devil Cults. He is also a poet of some distinction.

But the reaction of this 22-year-old child shows why Crowley's astonishing power has fled, why he is no longer feared. The world has advanced and he has grown older. His dark, mysterious power—and he undoubtedly had it—fades before the shibboleths of the new, materialistic generation. Hung, Freud, Adler and the behavioristic psychologists, which Miss 1928 drew on so amusingly by way of reprisal, have done for him.

Those who hated and hounded him around the globe, called him "monster," "Satanist" and "Sadist," now snap their fingers in derision. The king is deposed!

Crowley still has his followers in Paris, who tried to give the "Beast" a welcome on his return from "death," but their number has dwindled to pitiable few. Yet this bald-headed man with the hypnotic eyes was only a few years ago the self-proclaimed "Anti-Christ," the head of the celebrated "O.T.O." cult, with secret branches all over the world. Many people, including Crowley himself, believed he could perform miracles.

He first became widely known in the London of the nineties as a brilliant young poet. You will find a number of his poems in the Oxford Book of Mystical Verse. His friends were the most distinguished writers, artists and diplomats of the Yellow Book days. Then he turned to mysticism as a cult, and to drugs, but was never enslaved by them.

Crowley never did anything half way. His researches in ancient religious and mystical beliefs consumed years. He probably knows as much about these subjects as any man living today. He emerged from these studies to found the cult of "O.T.O.," founded on the ancient practices of the Rosicrucian Order and the Gnostics.

But Crowley was not satisfied with the teachings of books; he went among people. He lived for three months among Hindu religious fakirs and starved himself as they did. He walked across China, he studied the Mayan and Aztec religions in Mexico.

When he started his cult everything went swimmingly at first. He was handsome—then—and magnetic. Women were drawn to him, men liked him, too; he drew his disciples from both sexes. I have always thought he was absolutely sincere, but he was an excellent showman and instinctive psychologist in the bargain. A tremendous egotist himself, he catered to the egos of other people.

His maxim, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law," summed up his philosophy. He believed that people should be freed from the restrictions placed on them by civilized society. This phrase, beginning "Do what thou wilt," was the opening line in his ritual. He would say it and his disciples would then answer, "Love is the law, Love under will."

Another part of the ritual contained these words: "Dress ye all in fine apparel, eat rich food, and drink sweet wines and wines that foam; also take your fill of love, when, where and with whom you will."

These paganistic words pleased some people and horrified others. It was bruited about in London that the Crowley cult was a mere excuse for licentious love practices. Stories were told of Crowley branding beautiful women, whom he had selected as high priestesses, with the circle and star of the cult, applied with a hot dagger. Other stories told how women had been whipped by men and by one another—as part of the ritual. This was known as the mortification of the flesh.

London husbands, whose wives were becoming interested in the "Beast," kicked up a fearful row. Crowley disappeared, showed up in Paris, where his practices excited more horror, then dropped from sight again, followed by tales of narcotic orgies, which failed to master him.

He next appeared in New York's Greenwich Village, where he made many converts. I was in that city at the time and attended several of his séances where the "black mass" was read. There were blue lights, spirals of blue smoke, and Crowley, in dark monkish garb, sitting just outside the magic circle, intoning the words of his demoniac services. I never saw any brandings, but Crowley acknowledged that they occurred.

In New York he met Lea Hirsig, "Lea the Dead Soul," whom he vitalized into a brilliant personality. She had been a school teacher before she met him, a cool, aloof, delicate person. Crowley made her his high priestess, and she had been devoted to him ever since. He used to have her recite these words"

"I am the blue-lidded daughter of the sunset; I am the naked brilliance of the voluptuous night sky. Sing the rapturous love song unto me! Burn to me perfumes! Wear to me jewels! Drink to me, for I love you! I love you!

No wonder a bright new look came to Lea's quiet eyes! She became one of Crowley's branded disciples.

At this time the Beast—he used to sign his letters, "The Beast 666"—turned painter. He worked furiously, turning out weird pictures that he called solemnly "examples of introspec-

tive art." They were really childishly naive in their attempts to reproduce the nightmarish and horrible.

Then Crowley, "the purple priest," disappeared from Greenwich Village as mysteriously as he had come. He was next heard of in Sicily, where his cultish caperings created a downright scandal.

He established the Abbey of Thelema in the picturesque little town of Cefalu on the Mediterranean. There his converts gave homage to him.

One of Crowley's adherents was Raoul Loveday, a brilliant and fragile young Oxford poet, who brought his beautiful artists' model wife to the colony. Loveday swallowed Crowley's teachings hook, line and sinker, but his wife didn't. When Loveday died, his wife returned to London and published articles which insinuated that Crowley was in some way responsible for her husband's death. This was disproved, as it was shown that Loveday died from inflammation of the intestines. Nevertheless, Mrs. Loveday told such fantastic and harrowing stories of the goings-on in the colony that the Sicily experiment ended suddenly. Again the enemies of the Beast had driven him to cover.

Then came the story of the retreat to a Thibetan monastery, and the report of his murder.

Well, Aleister Crowley walks the boulevards again, a wrinkled, bald, old man. His hypnotic stare is as piercing as ever, his manner as solemn, his self-confidence as great. But the ladies!—they have found new gods.