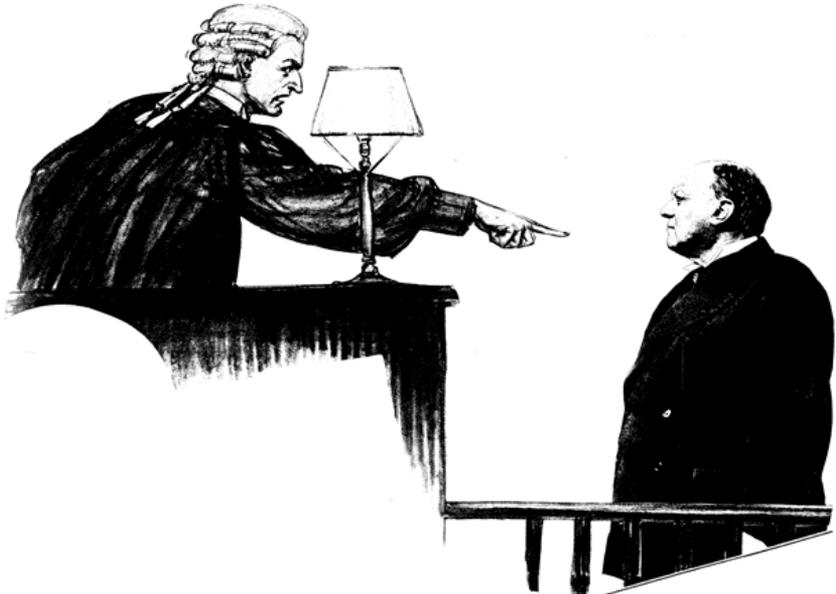


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**The 'WICKEDEST MAN in the WORLD
Goes to Court to Clear His Name**

**And an English Jurist of 40 Years'
Experience Declares Aleister
Crowley Taught Him Something
New About Evil.**



"I should like to be universally known as the greatest living poet," said Aleister Crowley to an astonished London courtroom not long ago. And there was reason for surprise, for such an ambition might not be the most obvious characteristic of "the wickedest man in the world," as Crowley is known to the readers of certain English newspapers. One might reasonably expect the man to be satisfied with his reputation as novelist, psychologist, mountain climber, explorer, secret agent and student of the occult. But Crowley is far from satisfied with his reputation, and late this spring he took it to court in what proved to be an unsuccessful attempt at getting it refurbished. Few have ever been more fulsomely denounced in the progress of their own suit for libel than Crowley.

"I have been over 40 years engaged in the administration of the law in one capacity or another," declared the presiding Justice. "I thought I knew every conceivable form of wickedness. I thought that everything which was vicious and bad had been produced at some time or another before me. I have learned in this case that we can always learn something more, if we live long enough. I have never heard such dreadful, horrible, blasphemous and abominable stuff as that which has been produced by the man who describes himself to you as the greatest living poet."

If it has been one of Crowley's life ambitions to shock the world, he certainly succeeded to a large extent in that libel suit. Its defendant was one Nina Hamnett, author of a book called "Laughing Torso," in which it was insinuated that Crowley was a practitioner of black magic. Resenting the implication, strangely enough—for he has been directly accused on innumerable occasions of the most startling array of crimes and vices—Crowley brought suit against Miss Hamnett. The chief grounds for resenting her charges were Crowley's claims that he is a practitioner of white magic and a righteous exposé of black magic. These grounds were quickly proved inconsequential, however, as soon as some of the plaintiff's privately printed books had been read in court and a former house guest at Crowley's Sicilian villa had testified that her husband had been forced to drink the blood of a cat during one of the occultist's orgiastic ceremonies there.



Nina Hamnett

The jury did not even retire. The 12 men simply looked unhappily in one another's faces and declared unanimously that Nina Hamnett had not been guilty of libel.

Whatever came out in the trial, it is safe to say that Aleister Crowley's reputation is not altogether of his own making, that he does not come up to the lurid reputation he has acquired. Whether he enjoys that reputation with a deep ecstasy and whether he has not worked hard to get it—these are other questions. But a biographical account, "The Legend of Aleister Crowley," by P. R. Stephenson, which came out a few years ago, does somewhat debunk the grewsome saga that has collected around his name.

Aleister Crowley is now about 60. He was the son of a family of religious fanatics, who must have encouraged his idea of his own badness, for his Mother nicknamed him "The Beast 666," a title which has always pleased him. At 20 he matriculated at Trinity University, Cambridge, an orphan with a very comfortable fortune. His career as a writer began at Cambridge with the publication of five volumes of verse.



Another View of Aleister Crowley

He was very much taken up with the love of fine typography and book-binding at the time, and the 30 books which he published during the ensuing 10 years (most of them privately printed) came out in handsome volumes. That they were limited to the rather small public which buys limited editions was as much owing to their content as to the author's tastes in fine printing. One of the poems was a reply to the German Psycho-pathologist, Krafft-Ebing, whose treatise on sexual abnormalities seems to have been an inspiration for many of Crowley's works.

From the time of his leaving Cambridge Crowley was as frequently as possible in the public eye, and usually stood in no flattering light. Stephenson, in his biography, has a good deal to say about this.

"I am far from exonerating Crowley himself," the writer says. "A quite extraordinary simplicity in his nature has led him systematically to invite hostility from almost every quarter as I shall show.

He has held nothing 'sacred' merely because it appeared sacred. Piece by piece he has alienated that vague mass of dogma called public opinion, and outraged it. He has attacked, with his devastating humor, precisely those people who have no sense of humor in their doctrines."

One of the first instances of this came about owing to Crowley's expertness as a mountain climber. He climbed Beachy Head, a 532-foot cliff of treacherous soft chalk on the Sussex coast, apparently with ease and nonchalance, though it was an excessively difficult feat. By this, and other exploits in Britain and the Alps, he "came to loggerheads with respectability as personified by the Alpine Club," his biographer relates, "and began exposing its members as incompetents and even as untruthful braggarts. Another hostile group!" To the superstitious such climbing of unclimbable places was uncanny and sinister; to less gifted alpinists it was distasteful.

But Crowley's eccentric actions and the odor of braggadocio which they achieved were not limited to mountain climbing. He decorated his Chancery lane flat in London in the manner of a temple of magic and lived there under the pseudonym "Count Svareff." He bought an estate in Inverness, Scotland, and came to the Café Royal in London tricked out in the full regalia of a Scottish chief; his pseudonym then was "Laird of Boleskine." In Paris, he took part in the controversy of art and morals which revolved around the unveiling of Epstein's Oscar Wilde monument; when the police refused to permit its unveiling, Crowley managed to unveil it anyway, by a stratagem. Sardonic, witty and intent on outraging the moralists, he lived his curious life in every part of the world, appearing and disappearing without warning. He spent two years traveling around the world, staying wherever he felt at home, wherever curiosity impelled him to stay, for as long a time as he chose.

It was during that eccentric Odyssey that he picked up much of his interest in and knowledge of the occult. At Ceylon he studied Yoga, the Hindu spiritual discipline which features the supreme control of body by mind. The trip also gave him an opportunity to get in some epic mountain climbing. He spent six months in the Himalayas with the Chogo Ri Expedition and climbed 22,000 feet up the Baltoro Glacier.

After returning from this excursion Crowley did a great deal more climbing, exploring, writing. In 1903 he was married to the sister of the artist Gerald Kelly, and they made a great many unusual journeys together. Crowley's travels took him to China, India, Egypt, Morocco—almost everywhere—and his writing continued during all his travels. During an unusually long stay in London he gave exhibitions, which were said to be neither vile nor shocking,

of various mystical ceremonies, and published a magazine, the Equinox, concerned with occultism. His publication of the alleged secrets of Rosicrucians brought about an unsuccessful attempt at suppression, and his freakish career elicited a book called "Crowleyanity," in which he was lauded immeasurably by the author, Captain J. F. C. Fuller, and infantryman who later was taken into the War Office. "It has taken 100,000,000 years to produce Aleister Crowley," intoned the Captain. "The world has indeed labored and has at last brought forth a man." That was one dissenting note in the general opprobrium that Crowley succeeded almost methodically in having heaped on his head. But presently this curious eccentric capped the climax of his unpopularity in England for all time.

The war broke out. Crowley tried, he says, to enlist. He was rejected for a physical ailment and went to America. His operations there are not completely known, but he confessed in the recent libel proceedings that he had written for a pro-German journal in Chicago. The editor of this organ of propaganda was George Sylvester Viereck. Crowley wrote articles in such disproportionate praise of the Kaiser, Hindenburg and Germany, that they might well be considered burlesques on the pro-German propaganda, intended to alienate rather than conciliate American public opinion. That, at any rate, is his claim. He was a secret service agent for the British, he said, and was attempting to discredit the enemy in America by writing her cause down as a farce and minimizing the effect of her propagandists.

Recently in France he declared that he also attempted to persuade Germany to sink American ships, in order that America should be forced to enter the war.

In England, Crowley's war writing brought down on him a general charge of treason and accomplished whatever his eccentric behavior, scandalous books and arrogance had failed to do in the way of sealing his reputation. He was permitted nevertheless to turn peaceably to his home in 1919. The charge was never officially made that he was a traitor, but the question of his war-time conduct was raised during his suit against Miss Hamnett. Her attorney read passages from Crowley's Chicago articles.

"Did you write that against your own country?" he was asked during cross-questioning.

"I did," said the plaintiff, "and I am proud of it."

"Was it part of German Propaganda in the United States?"

"Yes." And then he explained his action, but the explanation does not seem to have been convincing.

"From your youth have you openly defied all moral conventions?"

"No."

"Did you proclaim contempt for all the doctrine of Christianity?"

"That is quite wrong."

"Have you published material which is too indecent to read, too indescribably filthy to be read in public?"

"No. I have contributed certain pathological books entirely unsuited to the general public and only for circulation among students of psychopathology."

"Have you been attacked in unmeasured terms in the press of many countries?"

"I am not so familiar with the gutter press as that."

"They have all accused you of black magic?"

"I am a busy man and don't waste my time on garbage."

Here the cross-examining attorney referred to one of the plaintiff's books, "White Stains."

"Is it a book of indescribable filth?"

"It is a serious study of the progress of a man to the abyss of madness, disease and death."

"You have made a sonnet of unspeakable things, haven't you?"

"Yes."

He said only 100 copies of the book were made and handed to an expert on the subject in Vienna.

Crowley's books, and rumors which have come back to England from time to time and gotten attention in the press, have brought down on him accusations of almost every crime. He has been charged with white slaving, addiction to drugs, sadism, cannibalism, bestiality and even murder. The last charge was brought when the wife of a young Oxonian, Raoul Loveday, returned to England from a visit to Crowley's home in Cefalu, Sicily, without her husband. In her own autobiography the widow, later known as Betty May Sedgwick, stated that her husband had died of enteric fever. But the interviews she gave out on her return insinuated in no uncertain terms that young Loveday had been murdered by Aleister Crowley, "The King of Depravity," the "Wickedest Man in the World," "A Cannibal at Large," "A Man We'd Like to Hang"—as the newspaper John Bull, headlined these supposed revelations.

Whatever the merits of these and hundreds of other attacks, against none of which Crowley sought to defend himself by instituting libel proceedings, the 60-year old man still maintains his reputation as the wickedest man in the world. And there are frequent sinister hints that he has done something to deserve it, for the French authorities, usually tolerant and understanding, made no explanation when they had him deported after a six-year residence in Paris.

The legend of his diabolic life still persists.